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Cuckoo

Cuckoo

A COMEDY OF
ADJUSTMENTS

BY

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TO
Mahoney

Part i

Chapter i

THE Mediterranean, for a morning in June, was scarcely living up to its reputation. It was a gray-blue color turning, on the horizon, into a muddy slate. A white mist hung over the slopes of the mountains which formed a semi-circle at the back of the little *plage* of San Bartolomeo; the breeze was warm and damp. The Italian Riviera, in short, was doing everything of which, at the beginning of June, it was popularly supposed to be incapable.

It was the hour of the morning bathe, and precisely at eleven o'clock Morwenna Crowley and her younger sister, Veronica, emerged from the Villa Aurelia and walked down on to the beach. "I don't expect it will be cold in the water, you know," Morwenna observed, with her unhurried, precise articulation. "The sea always seems warmer on a gray day."

Veronica wondered why a famous novelist should be addicted to such "awful bromides." Then, noticing that for some reason Morwenna was looking her worst that morning, she realized that her sister had no intention of dallying on the beach. "Oh, damn this rotten place," she said. "Just look, there isn't a soul in sight. Why on earth Mother has this passion for economy I can't imagine. If we stay on here till the end of the

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summer we shall be eaten by mosquitoes, bitten by flies, stung by adders, and probably flayed alive by the sun."

"Oh, come along in," cried Morwenna, dropping her cloak and stepping delicately over the sand in her becoming pale-green *maillot*. But Veronica did not follow her. She took a packet of Macedonia cigarettes out of the pocket of her bathing wrapper, lit one and lay on her back on the damp sand. "I'm going to smoke this first," she announced. Morwenna walked on until the sea was up to her waist, then she ducked her head and began to swim. She swam slowly but she did not quickly tire and usually got about a mile from the shore before returning. The sea gave her a queer sensual satisfaction. The act of swimming soothed her and made her contemplative. A good deal of her verse, for she was a poet as well as a novelist, had been composed during these long morning swims, which formed one of the principal pleasures of her life.

Veronica, on the other hand, enjoyed the delights of the beach (when there were any) more than those of the water. She always went in eventually, and was a graceful diver, but swimming bored her unless she had a man for company. She took a perfectly frank pleasure in male admiration, and she knew that in her pretty bathing-costume, before it got damp, she was at her best. She was twenty-three and looked eighteen. She had fair bobbed hair, long delicate legs, firm and shapely breasts and narrow hips. All her movements were lithe and graceful, and when she ran races across the sand

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observers had some excuse for remembering Atalanta and the golden apple.

This morning there wasn't anybody with whom to run a race. The people at the Hôtel Paradiso—three exquisite young men who had been sent down from Oxford, a fascinating widow of her own age, of whom Mrs. Crowley strongly disapproved, and the widow's mother—hardly ever came on to the beach before six in the evening. They were supposed to sit up all night drinking *Cinzano brut* in each other's bedrooms, after dancing at Alassio. They were supposed, in fact, to do all kinds of wicked and exciting things. Veronica had long tried to get to know them, but the young men seemed much more interested in each other than in her. They were supposed, in fact, to do all kinds of "post-war." The Vernon-Campbells, who lived in the villa half-way up the hill, had gone to Nice, and they weren't much loss. Guy was always trying to kiss her, and his wife knew and loathed her for it. Nina Harding and her alleged "brother," Bill Hepburn, she wanted to know, but her mother strongly disapproved of them, also. The four good-looking Italian officers who had stayed in San Bartolomeo during April and May, and had competed with Latin ardor for the favor of dancing with her at the Kursaal, had disappeared for good and were now nothing but a glamorous memory. What a life it was, dragging round for six months of the year in the cheaper countries of Europe, staying in *pensions* or furnished villas, and always meeting the same kind

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of people! No "English Colony" that Veronica had yet encountered had differed in any way from any other. Each had its acknowledged "social leader"—usually some self-important woman who, without any more claim to birth, breeding, brains or manners than her neighbors, contrived by an elaborate apparatus of silence, exclusiveness and *hauteur* to impose herself upon her compatriots. Each had its collection of retired military bar-loomers, social strugglers from the London suburbs, pushing novelists, elderly spinsters, wealthy invalids and comic clergymen. The only really attractive-looking men were nearly always accompanied by mistresses and were therefore socially inaccessible. It was all very well for Morwenna. She had her flat in London and all her clever friends, and enjoyed talking about art and that kind of thing. She made plenty of money and lived her own life, and was presumably happy. But what on earth was a girl with good looks and no brains to do, without men? And how were men to be found at San Bartolomeo?

Veronica pressed her heels into the sand and frowned at her toes. "Why, oh, why, is Mamma so keen on my being an English lady?" she thought. "Have I got to go on rusting away until I'm Morwenna's age, doing nothing, feeling nothing, seeing nothing? I can't stand it. I'll marry the first man who will set me free, no matter what he looks like or how old he is or whether he's a gentleman or a pork-butcher." She took another cigarette, and was bending towards the match

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sheltered in her two hands when a shadow fell over her shoulder. "I say, d'you mind giving me a light, after you? I left all my matches behind." Veronica turned with a start. It seemed almost like an answer to prayer, for the voice was a male voice and one of curious charm. Its owner looked as if he were in the early forties. He was clean-shaven and dark, with a lock of white hair on his forehead. He had on a faded blue bathing-suit and Veronica noticed that his legs were very hairy. His eyes were a curious greenish-brown, and when he smiled he showed a line of attractively uneven white teeth. Veronica took in these impressions while she was in the act of saying "Oh, certainly" and handing him her box of weak-kneed Italian vestas. He took the box and stretched himself on the sand by her side. "I can't smoke *caporal*, and I can't smoke Spanish cigarettes, but I can smoke these Macedonias all day and all night. I suppose that's one of the great attractions of Italy. One's bad habits are all so easily indulged."

"What do you think of San Bartolomeo?" Veronica asked.

"I've only been here two days," said the stranger, "but it seems to me to have at least one point in its favor. There is nothing to see in it. The town is one of the dullest on the whole Italian Riviera. It is very little known, never, I believe, uncomfortably full, and it has not yet been over-exploited by our fellow-countrymen. The bathing isn't particularly good, but the sea remains the sea;

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and the hills at the back of us are enchanting. I've got a very pleasant room at the Villa Rosa. In fact I'm inclined to like San Bartolomeo. What about you?"

"I loathe it," said Veronica. "I've been here since the beginning of April with my mother and sister, and there's hardly been a soul to speak to."

"Hm. Not enough dancing and that sort of thing, I suppose. Yes, you must find it rather tame." He turned and smiled at her. "Personally, I've finished with those delights, so it doesn't affect me."

"Don't you care for dancing?" There was a note of disappointment in Veronica's voice.

"I used to be a very keen dancer before the war. But in the last year or two conventional English life has become rather nauseous to me. I can't explain to you exactly why. Unlike the gentleman in Kipling's poem, it gives me no thrill to be reminded of "all that ever went with evening dress." I admit I still clean my teeth, and occasionally wash my hands. And for a month or two in every year I enjoy the comforts of civilization. I'm enjoying them now, for example. For the rest, I'm really happier among fishermen or peasants, in places where the Continental *Daily Mail* doesn't circulate. Islands are my special hobby. I adore them. I should love to own one!"

Veronica did not quite know what to make of her companion. He sounded rather thrilling. But her mother's daughter and Morwenna's sister could hardly be blamed for wondering whether he were

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or were not "a gentleman," and whether he would be considered "all right" at the Villa Aurelia. As he was staying at San Bartolomeo for some time they would be certain to meet constantly on the beach, so Veronica thought she might as well discover his name and give him her own. With the technique acquired by much practice she tactfully led the conversation to a point which encouraged him to introduce himself. His name was Giles Denham.

"Here's my sister coming back from her swim," Veronica remarked, when the introduction was over. "I suppose we ought to go in and get wet."

They walked out through the shallow water until, at the point where it became deep enough to swim, they encountered Morwenna. Morwenna's social façade, her manner, was always in evidence even in the most unconventional circumstances. One of her literary friends, with the odious insight which writers have about one another's weaknesses, had described her as "always busy being a lady." On the present occasion she bowed slightly, smiled with reserved amiability, made a few appropriate remarks and then added that she was going in, as it was rather cold. "Come up and see us at tea-time, won't you, Mr. Denham?" she suggested. "We are staying at the Villa Aurelia."

Denham thanked her, and said he would like to come very much. He had heard her name with particular interest. It was an unusual one. There were not likely to be two Morwenna Crowleys. She must be the author of "The Untutored Mind," of

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"Speedwell" and of that haunting story, "With Unrelenting Pace." He had read the book shortly after the catastrophe which had changed him from a successful Chancery Court barrister with a growing reputation, into a homeless wanderer with a broken nerve and shattered health, and the similarity of the plot to his own story had struck him as amazing. That woman, he thought, underneath her slight veneer of affectation must have unusual insight, sympathy and imagination. And what a turn for satire she had! He was pleasantly thrilled at having met her, and faced the prospect of having to put on shoes and socks, collar and tie, almost with equanimity. "Is your sister *the* Morwenna Crowley?" he asked of Veronica, though he had no doubt whatever as to the answer. "Oh, yes, Morwenna's written tons of books and is frightfully clever. She's got all the brains of the family. She'll be tickled to death if you've read any of them."

"I've read three or four," Denham replied, "and liked them all, but one of them impressed me more than any novel I have read for ages."

"They'll click at once," was Veronica's morose reflection. She knew Morwenna's failings as only a sister could know them, but she was loyal and affectionate, proud of the family genius, and not unduly jealous or resentful. All the same, it was rather hard lines to pick up a man, during a man famine, only to find him ripe to fall into Morwenna's lap. Veronica did not approve of Mor-

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wenna's attitude towards the male sex, nor of the way she was accustomed to treat her numerous admirers. She took all she could get—love, adoration, flattery, and “attention” (which included an unfair amount of petty cash from the male pocket, as well as anything else she could extract in the way of theaters, dances, and dinner-parties)—and gave nothing in return, except the priceless gift of her intellectual conversation. It was a bit stiff, really. She had been engaged several times, but on each occasion the man had been sent about his business by a letter, valuable, no doubt, as a literary composition, which breathed affection, regret, financial common-sense and exalted sentiments in regard to the normal functions of “the flesh.” Only the chastest of embraces, in which, however, she indulged herself as liberally as some teetotallers and non-smokers indulge in chocolate creams, would she ever concede to her adorers. If they were not satisfied, then they must go elsewhere. The poetess, having already conquered, as she supposed, upon the higher plane, could stoop no further. All this, and much more, passed with great rapidity through Veronica's brain. Coming events cast their shadows before. It was a shame, because he was rather a dear.

On the beach after their bathe they raced as far as the Vernon-Campbells' boat and back. Denham, though in thoroughly bad condition, won by a foot. “It's these wretched skirts we have to wear,” said Veronica. “Why on earth are the Italians so prudish? They make even kids of three wear

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clothes. In England there are lots of places where one needn't wear anything at all."

"I believe it's not so bad in Southern Italy," Denham remarked. "But the Latins are like that. When you go north, in England, Germany and Scandinavia, you find a different point of view towards the human body."

"I'm fond of mine," said Veronica reflectively. "I like running and dancing and I love to feel absolutely fit. Morwenna on the other hand is exclusively spiritual—except that she eats rather a lot." Denham laughed.

"I shall be late for luncheon," said Veronica. "Good-by. See you this afternoon!" She waved to him and ran along the beach in her bathing-wrapper, while Denham sought the spot where he had left his towel and clothes.

Chapter ii

GILES DENHAM, in his wanderings about Europe, had, as far as possible, avoided coming into contact with his fellow-countrymen. The conversation of retired military men, superannuated civil servants, honeymoon couples, and spinsters addicted to water-colors bored him to distraction. Since his *débâcle* he had yielded to a morbid dislike of social intercourse with people of his own class. He detested tea-parties and conventional clothes as much as he loved *caffès*, wine-shops, bars and bare feet. In European fashion he had "gone native," and the more intimate he became with the fishermen and peasants of the Mediterranean coast the more he loved them.

Occasionally, however, he could not stifle a desire to talk once again, in every sense of the word, his own language. He had come to San Bartolomeo knowing that there would be English people there and vaguely hoping that they might prove the kind he wanted. The Crowleys seemed decidedly promising, and he looked forward with what was almost a thrill of pleasurable anticipation to going to tea with them.

While he was making his way along the beach towards the Villa Aurelia, he passed a tall young man with bronzed skin and dark tousled hair

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walking along with a slim, bright-eyed woman with a great mop of tangled brown curls, who was dressed in a red cotton frock. Both were bare-foot. The man wore a white shirt open at the neck and running-shorts. His hairy legs were burnt brown by the sun. He at least was an Englishman: the woman Denham could not place. As he went by the man was declaiming, in an imitation High Church voice, a rime which sent his companion into convulsions of laughter. Denham caught the words, and more because of the humor of the delivery than because they were remarkable for wit, began involuntarily to laugh, too.

The lady smiled at him pleasantly. Denham's spontaneous gurgle of amusement served as an introduction. "Please forgive us," she said. "We get worse every day! The Vicar of Clacton-on-Sea, though, is one of the very mildest in Bill's répertoire."

"Do you know this one . . . ?" began the bronzed young man, who had been referred to as Bill. But his companion, whose name appeared to be Nina, declined to allow him to continue. "I don't believe you know one single decent story," she said. "At the Villa Miramare they are awfully swanky because they know two. They are neither of them funny, but, with apologies, both might be let loose in any company, even at the Villa Aurelia."

"Is the Villa Aurelia very proper?" Denham asked. "I'm just off to tea there. As I'm not

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quite certain which one it is, perhaps you could point it out to me?" Nina did so. "There you are," said she. "It's that gray stone villa with the red roof, next to the pink one with the palm-trees in its front garden. I think one *does* rather have to edit one's jokes a bit for Mrs. Crowley," she went on. "This place is divided up, you know, into the respectable people and the non-respectable . . ."

"We, I need hardly say, are non-respectable," said Bill. "Oh, swish!" cried Nina, giving a high kick followed by a series of hand-turns on the sand. Denham realized, with joy, that he had encountered genius—a genius for the purely idiotic. San Bartolomeo was going to be fun, for evidently Nina and Bill could be trusted to keep things lively. He began to wish that he were not going to tea with the Crowleys and could stay and talk to them. By the time they reached the Villa, Denham realized that he was going to like these two absurd creatures. Nina, on her side, had "spotted" him at first glance as being *simpatico*. "Do you bathe before breakfast?" she asked. "If so, you'll find us here, at about half-past seven. We've got a boat. It's much better than bathing off the beach. Good-by. Be careful!"

Denham waved to them and walked, with some internal qualms, up the cement path to the Crowleys' house. The door was opened by a middle-aged Italian woman, dressed in black, with her hair tied up in a black silk handkerchief. There

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was a suspicious neatness about her, which seemed to give ominous indications of the character of her mistress.

He was ushered at once into a cool, dim room horribly furnished with chairs, armchairs and sofas covered in red velvet, a square mahogany dinner-table and an ugly sideboard. A copy of the *London Mercury* and the latest issue of the *Criterion* lay on the table, together with the *Morning Post* and *The Times* Literary Supplement. A round, plump, white-haired woman of about sixty rose at his approach. "This is Mr. Denham, Mother," Morwenna murmured, after a disconcerting pause. He shook the plump extended hand, conscious of a glance that was grossly impertinent in the frankness of its critical appraisal, and then greeted the two girls. "I hear you met my two daughters on the beach this morning," observed Mrs. Crowley, in the voice of a cross-examining counsel.

"That's where every one gets picked up," Veronica interposed brightly. Denham was grateful to her for trying to lighten the weight of her mother's touch. He began, internally, to be extremely amused. On the surface, as he had grown rather nervous of recent years, he showed some obvious signs of discomfiture. Mrs. Crowley registered a mental note. "Ill at ease in society." The somber maid brought in a tea-tray containing an ugly silver tea-pot, bread-and-butter, and some—for those who liked them—rather attractive cakes. Tea was one of Mrs. Crowley's meals. She liked to have it as

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"nice" at her villa at San Bartolomeo as she had had it in the old days at Watford. "Morwenna dear, will you pour out?"

Morwenna poured out, and while Mrs. Crowley emitted devastating remarks at short intervals, over which Veronica immediately squirted the soda-water of light chatter, Denham had an opportunity of studying the woman who had seemed, in her story, to understand his case so well. Her face was an almost perfect oval, and her dark hair which had only recently been bobbed, enhanced its pallor. Her eyes were a rather forbidding shade of greenish-gray. Although she had a sedate, almost a prim manner, the manner of a middle-aged, Victorian spinster, it was evident that she did not disdain the use of a lip-stick. There were wrinkles round her eyes and lines across her neck, but Denham judged that she could not possibly be older than thirty-two. She was beautifully powdered, and the filmy white frock which she wore was too simple not to have been costly. Her nose was rather long, narrow and slightly hooked, which increased her resemblance to an Italian type which is represented on the walls of nearly every art-gallery in Europe. Her mouth was small and the corners of it curled downwards sometimes, when her face was in repose, giving it an expression that was almost sinister. The hands were small and shapely, with tapering fingers of which the polished nails were cut to a point, so that the hand resembled an exquisite claw.

While the business of handing the tea-cups and

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passing the cakes and the bread-and-butter was in progress Mrs. Crowley, with a baleful gleam of curiosity in her round black eyes, launched her barbed platitudes, her provocative allusions, her suavely casual questions. Denham, though far from adroit at social contacts of this kind, had no intention of letting himself be turned inside out by his redoubtable hostess. He was at pains to follow none of the paths so artfully indicated, with the result that in a quarter of an hour, while he had acquired sundry definite pieces of information about Mrs. Crowley—for example, that she had for many years moved in the best society of Singapore, that her father had been the Bishop of Brixton, that a number of her friends were “in the service” (though the late Mr. Crowley had apparently pursued some commercial vocation), that she had been an intimate friend of Lady So-and-so, the wife of His Excellency the Governor-General, and that English society at San Bartolomeo was very mixed—she had not been able to gain from him anything concrete on which her guessing-machine could get to work. That he had lived in London told her nothing. Certainly he spoke like an educated man. But one simply could not be too careful. People nowadays were so deceptive.

Veronica, when it seemed to her that her mother ought to have had time to conclude her preliminary examination, brightly butted in and remarked that Mr. Denham was a great admirer of Morwenna’s books. Morwenna looked up, with a demure smile, and asked him which ones he had read. Denham

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was thankful for this opportunity of side-tracking Mrs. Crowley and began to talk with great animation and attention to detail about "With Unrelenting Pace."

"I am glad you like it," Morwenna replied. "In some ways I think it is perhaps the best thing I've done. I tried to keep the scales even, to state the wife's side fairly, while bringing out her unconscious cruelty to her husband. I believe that more than half the cruelty in the world is due to selfishness and lack of imagination rather than to a definite desire to inflict suffering."

"Would you like a cigarette, Mr. Denham?" Veronica asked, without, however, offering him one. It was the signal for escape.

"Smoke in the garden, my dears, won't you?" said Mrs. Crowley. "If you will excuse me, Mr. Denham, I shall go and lie down for a little while before dinner." Denham opened the door for her and bowed over her arctic handshake. She swept majestically from the room, showing deliberate technique in her impressiveness. He could imagine also her entries. She would know in her own mind precisely "how to come into a room," how to sit down, in what posture to be "discovered." How important all that had seemed to the middle-classes in Queen Victoria's day! Denham's heart bled for her daughters.

The moment Mrs. Crowley was out of the room Veronica produced a brown cardboard box containing a hundred Macedonia cigarettes, and a box of matches, and led the way into a long garden,

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at the end of which, in a corner shaded by a group of acacia trees, was a hammock and some wicker armchairs. While Veronica danced on ahead, Morwenna and Denham followed at a more stately pace. Morwenna, showing a remarkably pretty pair of legs in the process, got into the hammock and Denham and Veronica settled themselves in chairs facing her. When he lifted his eyes to look beyond the confines of the garden he could see in the distance the village of Diano Castello crowning a low spur of the hills and culminating, with exquisite effect, in its golden campanile. Behind rose the mountains, their lovely shapes outlined against a sky of pale, gleaming blue. High overhead the sky was deepest azure. It seemed impossible that only a few hours ago it had been gray and overcast. Scarcely a sound broke the warm stillness of the Italian afternoon. Morwenna, when her cigarette was lighted, talked easily and intelligently on a wide range of subjects and Denham found himself more keenly stimulated than he had been for many months. Here, evidently, was a first-class brain—the spinsterish manner, he guessed, was only a mask carefully used to conceal a masculine intellect. Gradually he became aware that a peculiar personal charm was impinging upon his consciousness. It was like suddenly detecting a delicious perfume.

Morwenna did not in any obvious way try to draw him, as her mother had done, but her manner seemed subtly to invite him to talk about himself. He began to describe some of the things that he

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had done and seen during his two years' absence from London, referred to the fact that he had had a nervous breakdown and given up his practice at the Bar.

"Will you go back and take it up again, when you feel stronger?" Morwenna asked.

"Do you know, that is just what I can't decide. Everything urges me to do so. I was getting on pretty well when I crocked up, and I daresay I should get plenty of work again if I went back to my chambers. But I don't know. Whenever I decide in my own mind to return to London some inner voice always asks me the devastating question, 'Why?' And I can't answer it. I have nothing to bind me to England, no ties of any kind, and I like the life out here and love the people. I have just about enough to live on in moderate comfort. I admit I sometimes feel that my existence is one of disgraceful idleness, and my conscience pricks me. But I have no ambition to make a success as a barrister, and no dependents, and I am as happy as a loafer in the Italian sunshine as I am ever likely to be in London."

"You *are* lucky!" cried Veronica. "Though if *I* had enough to live on I'd choose somewhere livelier than San Bartolomeo."

Denham laughed. "So should I have done at your age, Miss Crowley. Unfortunately some pleasures pall, while others don't."

Morwenna's glance seemed to say: "You are an idle, worthless waster and you know it." Her voice remarked: "As you have the strength of mind

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for this kind of life and the necessary intellectual resources, I can well understand your reluctance to get into harness again. Personally I can't do without the stimulus of hard work." She laughed with queer bitterness. "If I didn't produce and tire myself out in the effort, I should probably go mad. Besides, to be frank, I'm only happy when I am working. My work absorbs me almost entirely."

"That I can well understand," said Denham, unpacking his censer and his incense. "With your exceptional gifts, if you will forgive me for saying so, it seems only natural. I'd give a good many years of my life to have written as fine a book as 'With Unrelenting Pace.' For me, all I have to look back on is about fifteen years of endeavor, in the interests of my clients, to make the worse appear the better cause. All I have to look forward to, if I follow my profession, is to do the same thing until I die. I don't care for politics and haven't any desire to get into Parliament. Oddly enough there is one thing I should like to be able to do, and that is to be a painter. Unfortunately I have no talent."

"These futile Englishmen in Italy," thought Morwenna, "with their little private incomes and their water-color drawings!"

"I suppose you sketch a good deal?" she said.

"Yes, constantly. It does nobody any harm and I like it."

"But do you really find it enough to occupy your life?"

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"Oh, I am fond of the sensual pleasures too, almost as fond of them as the Latins are. I like good wine, the sea, and the sunshine, and good-looking people, and the look of the hills at evening. I enjoy sailing and spearing fish, and riding when I can get a decent mount. And I love the actual sensation of idleness. I like to loaf, consciously. It is decidedly pleasant after twenty years of rather strenuous work, with the war thrown in."

"Heart trouble!" thought Veronica, who was at bottom a hopeless sentimentalist. "Some woman has smashed up his life for him and now he has nothing left to live for." Queer little thoughts, that were like dreams, came and went. She looked down at her legs, which were as shapely as Morwenna's, and at her fine ankles, and deep in her heart there was a voice which spoke to Denham and said: "I am desirable, and I am unused and unwanted, and I am life. Take me and use me."

"But if you are fond of riding and that sort of thing, Mr. Denham, why ever aren't you fond of dancing?" Veronica did so want a dancing partner—absolutely *anybody* would do.

"Too vain," Denham replied. "Ages ago, before the war, I was rather a good dancer, particularly if the champagne was adequate. We danced rather strenuously—waltzes with runs, and Bostons and so on, and lots of us were 'three collar men'! The one-step, the grandfather of jazz, was positively smart about 1912. You can't remember it, of course, because you were in the nursery. I hate

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dancing now because I'm too old to learn these modern non-alcoholic blues and jazzes that you can do at luncheon or at tea. I don't like doing badly what I used to do well. That's why I don't dance."

"But if you can get round and feel the music, that's all that matters," Veronica retorted. "The most incredibly ancient generals dance at Alassio like two-year-olds, and they have more partners than they know what to do with. You really ought to keep up your dancing. You'll be able to go on for at least another thirty years, Mr. Denham, and it's *so* good for you."

Denham laughed, showing his strong irregular white teeth. "Well, let's all go into Alassio to-morrow night and see how we get on," he suggested. "Won't you both dine with me at Beppo's? We can catch the 6.20, dine about half-past seven and get to the Kursaal soon after nine. We shall get more than two hours' dancing before the last train goes. What do you say, Miss Crowley?"

Morwenna looked at Denham and then at Veronica. She had every intention of accepting. She thoroughly enjoyed being taken out, liked a good dinner and was almost as fond of dancing as her sister. But her feminine technique was of the pre-war brand. She was an adept at all the wiles which the Victorians considered appropriate to women and had none of the spontaneity of her younger sister. After some moments of careful consideration, she remarked in the doubtful tone

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of one who if very strongly persuaded may possibly consent to grant a favor, "I really ought to do some work to-morrow night."

"Oh, but, Mops darling," cried Veronica, "surely you can do it some other time?" "Well, yes, I suppose I *can*," Morwenna agreed. "It does one good to dance occasionally. Very well. We'll meet you at the station, then, Mr. Denham, shall we, at a quarter past six?"

"Right you are. That will be splendid. By the way, please don't be too magnificent, because my only evening clothes are being stored by Cook's in Florence."

Morwenna's glance became glacial, and she only pinned on a smile with an effort. "Oh, there's no fear of our being that," she said.

When Denham had gone, Veronica eagerly asked her sister what she thought of him. "Don't you think he's rather nice?" she urged.

"Yes," said Morwenna; "and I should think he has had rather a poor time recently. I should say he is a gentleman, though I don't think Mother thought so. Her standards are so exacting!"

Veronica made a grimace of disgust. "Hang it all, Mops, I don't believe we're anything to write home about, when it comes to the point, even if Grandpapa *was* a bishop! And what does it matter, anyway? He wears trousers, that's enough for me."

"You are easily pleased," observed Morwenna, with faint contempt.

Chapter iii

ON the following day Denham went down on to the beach at half-past seven and encountered Bill and Nina. They were sitting in their bathing things, with their backs against the boat, evidently waiting for him.

"We wondered if you'd turn up," said Nina. "Apart from the charm of your society, the boat's a bit heavy. By the way, this is my brother, Mr. William Hepburn, and I," she continued, getting up and curtsyng, and putting one finger coyly on her lips, "am Mrs. Hugo Harding . . ."

When Denham had introduced himself, they proceeded to push the boat into the water. Bill took the oars and Nina and Denham sat in the stern. They rowed across the bay to an unfinished stone breakwater on to which, by the exercise of a good deal of energy and the help of a rope, it was possible to climb. There was a large rug in the boat which mitigated the hardness and the heat of the stone, and on this, when they were tired of the water, they lay and had their sun-bath. Denham had brought cigarettes and Nina a supply of oranges and *nespoli*, of which she was inordinately fond.

"I hate really polite bathing," Nina observed as she stretched herself luxuriously on her back, with her arms crossed behind her head. "The

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kind of thing the younger Crowley girl goes in for at 11.30 a. m. precisely. It's a sort of paddling parade, instead of honest-to-God bathing. And don't you hate partners who chatter while they are dancing?"

"I don't think people ought to have to talk when they eat," said Bill. "I've very few back teeth, and not many of them meet, so that if I prattle brightly at dinner I don't get any. All wrong really. Conversation goes naturally with drink and tobacco."

"How did you like Ma Crowley?" Nina asked, "also the Misses Crowley?"

"I thought the two girls were delightful," Denham replied. "The mother, I suppose, can't help it."

"I'll bet she put you through your paces," said Bill, "and tried to pump you about your birth, education and 'social status.' I had it on the tip of my tongue to tell her that the founder of the Hepburn family fortunes was a manufacturer of contraceptives, but Nina pinched me at the crucial moment and cramped my style."

"She doesn't bow to us now," said Nina, "because she thinks that all my four kids are bastards and that Veronica's morals might be contaminated. I long to assure her that she is right and that I intend to have at least sixteen more, by sixteen different fathers." "But," said Bill, in his High Church voice, "wise-ah counsels prevailed!"

"Come back to breakfast with us, won't you?"

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Nina suggested. "That is, if you don't mind seeing life. The natives seem to like us, I don't know why. In any case, they come in and out of our house as if we were one of themselves. It scandalizes the English colony, I need hardly say. They think it lowers the British prestige, or some—er—rot of that kind. Our place is quite close to your *pension*, you know. It's the square orange-colored villa with fig-trees and Mediterranean pines in the front garden. It calls itself the Villa Teresa." Denham had noticed the villa and admired its garden and was delighted to have such agreeable neighbors.

Nina Harding had spoken truly when she suggested that one "saw life" at the Villa Teresa. The house seemed to be full of Italian children of all ages and degrees of beauty, in addition to Mrs. Harding's three small boys and her one small daughter. The boys had their sweethearts—there was Nuca for Roddy Harding and Stephania for Mike and Cesira for Francis. Felice was the chosen friend of little Anne; and in addition there was Giovanni, who had come in to bring Nina a bouquet of roses. He was the son of the landlord, a handsome youth of seventeen, brown as a berry, with a wide mouth and slow, disarming smile. He did odd jobs about the house, such as getting the ice, mending the electric lights, if they went wrong, and gathering wood for the kitchen range. When he thought it fitting that he should do so, he came to a meal. He did all these things for love of Nina, whom he adored, humbly, in a manner at once romantic and practical. In addition to the human

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beings there was a temperamental hen which lived on the meat-safe, just inside the front door of the house. It was a white hen, with a knowing eye and the most uncivilized personal habits. Every morning it gave tongue. Piercing screams of joy and pride reverberated through the house, but it was never an egg which Charlotte had deposited. She took pleasure only in evil-doing, and as Pina, the cook, observed, if she would not lay she deserved to stew. Pina's daughter Margarita was usually somewhere about the premises, helping her mother, also Pina's friend Ernesto, a young man with at least a thousand flashing white teeth and any number of blazing black eyes. Ernesto was cab-driver in ordinary to the establishment, and thus practically a member of it.

Nina issued a series of words of command, and in a few minutes, more or less under the control of the governess, Miss Tilda Wigsworth, the children effaced themselves, and their elders were left to drink their *caffè-latte* in peace. The room was dim and beautifully cool and Pina had been at work with the fly-powder so that the pests were temporarily defeated.

"Do you think it's awful of me," Nina asked, "to let my kids run about with the Italian children, instead of learning to be proper little Englishmen? I'm afraid I don't love the English. They *are* such slaves. If they hadn't chains, they'd invent them. Take Morwenna Crowley, for example. She's as clever as they make 'em and her books are brilliant, but she daren't let herself go. She's like that prig

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in the awful poem, the shepherdess of sheep. She is *so* circumspect and wise! She is determined never to say or do anything unbefitting an English gentlewoman, and her motto is, When in doubt, shut up. So she has grown shut-up. It's probably your mission in life to open her out a bit, Mr. Denham. Don't you think so, Bill?"

Bill agreed. "Job of work, but worth while, I should imagine, if you pull it off."

"We *do* take a nice, friendly, spiteful interest in our neighbors, don't we?" said Nina. "But then they *are* such fun. If they had any sense they'd get no end of amusement out of us. Indeed I think they do, in their own way."

"I'm taking the Crowley girls to dance at Alassio to-night," Denham remarked. "Why don't you two come as well? It wouldn't matter being a man short."

"Not it," said Bill. "Nina never gives an Englishman a look in. She gets picked up by one tick after another, chauffeurs, hairdressers, cadets from Oneglia and the lord knows who. Usually she finds them first on the train. There's a sort of corridor technique on this line—flashing smiles, demure glances . . ."

"Now don't be British, Bill. I can't stand it," said Nina. "I adore Italians and that's the end of it. I like their dancing, I like flirting with them, and for two pins I'd have a dozen Italian lovers."

"But aren't they monotonous?" Bill inquired. "I've never seen one who hadn't black curly hair, flashing eyes, glittering teeth and a faint odor of

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garlic. Surely, when you know one, you know the lot?"

"They know how to treat women, anyway," said Nina, "which is more than any Englishman I've ever encountered does."

"And how is that?" asked Denham, laughing. "I'm afraid I'm one of the ignorant Englishmen. I should like to be able to treat all my friends alike, and if I had a wife or a mistress I should like her to be the closest of my friends."

"Idealistic but unworkable," retorted Nina. "The Italians have a subtle combination of complete physical brutality and exquisite consideration, which enables them to keep their women in order. They are possessive and they know how to keep what's theirs."

"Suits the climate, I suppose," said Bill, good-humoredly, "like olive oil, bel canto, wine, stone floors, fig-trees, the siesta and gesticulation. Wouldn't do in London, though. Our climate produces agonized husbands—'Favorite recreation: grief,' as some one said of Mark Sabre—divorce-court proceedings, prolonged and complicated family quarrels, and subtle refinements of sentimental misery. We get and keep our women by making them sorry for us. I knew a man once who had a marvelous line in suicide. He made a few half-hearted attempts to do himself in, and on the strength of them had *affaire* after *affaire*. He finally pinched the wife of a friend of mine by drinking half a bottle of gin, bursting into tears and whining that he'd nothing to live for and was

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going to blow his brains out. The lady fell, instantly. Now, when he wants to keep her in order he polishes the revolver. All a question of climate, really. The approaches to women are innumerable in their variations and the only result that matters is the same everywhere. Babies."

"Well, I'd sooner have my babies by a man with some guts to him, some fire and virility, than by a sloppy, whining, sentimental Englishman," said Nina, with a sound approaching a snort.

"I should advise an ingenious combination," said Bill. "Stick to Englishmen for companionship—you know you like sharpening your already sharp tongue on us—and reserve your garlicky bravoes with the glittering teeth purely for stud purposes."

"Now, Bill! There's a touch of bitterness in your voice which ill becomes the perfect brother. Flattering, though."

Bill laughed, sardonically.

"Whoops, dearies!" Nina cried, shaking her mane of tangled brown curls. "Let us go into the garden and see if we can think of a proper story between us. Bill dear, remember you are going to pass the evening with the Misses Crowley."

A broad smile had overspread Bill's engaging countenance. "I've just thought of one," he said, when they reached the shady corner and settled themselves on the grass. "There was a young lady of Lynn." The young lady of Lynn naturally recalled to memory that absent-minded young person

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called May. May was closely related to Miss Mary Macaster (who probably *would*, if you asked her), and who, in her turn, was connected, all too intimately, with the bad man of Milan.

"As the mother of a growing girl," said Nina, "I really don't think Bill ought to be allowed to meet Veronica."

"I will be good," said Bill simply. "Even Queen Victoria could say no more."

Denham smoked one more Macedonia cigarette, resisted a gin and vermouth and went off for a stroll in the town, to digest his new acquaintances and get an appetite for luncheon. He was amused and charmed by Nina and Bill, and alternately attracted and repelled by Morwenna. All the qualities which Morwenna seemed to lack Nina appeared to have in abundance. He could see that she was capable of generosity as well as spite, that she was daring, full of fire, energy, humor and appreciation. He guessed that she was one of those who went halfway to meet life, with both hands outstretched. He knew the type—passionate yet chaste, an infuriating but adorable wife, a triumphant mother of sons, a glutton for affection, sharp-tongued, kind-hearted, gay and unhappy, a keen critic of literature and the arts, very musical, fond of dancing, riding, swimming, driving, sailing, fishing, and flirting: the opposite to the "won't play" type. A vain egoist, perhaps and almost certainly a liar and variable as the wind. But at least she had one asset, never common with Englishwomen of any class—exceptionally good

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manners. Morwenna, on the other hand . . . But the thought of Morwenna, the vision of her sitting demurely in the ugly dining-room of the Villa Aurelia with her vulgar old snob of a mother, strangely persisted, would not go away. Like a sentimental schoolboy in the grip of calf-love, he caught himself wondering whether he would meet her. He walked down the shadeless Corso Roma into the Piazza Umberto, where the little tables of the Caffè Roma were dotted about under the palm-trees. Several English people were eating ices in the shade, but Morwenna was not among them. She wouldn't be. He remembered holidays in England, by the seaside, when he was a schoolboy. The girl one hoped to meet never by any chance made an appearance at the desired moment. It was an art. Just the kind of art in which Morwenna *would* be perfect. He sat down and ordered a poisonous pink "Americano." Through the green of the trees the sea appeared, a bar of azure. It was a picture-postcard day, at last, after a week of variable weather. A sudden feeling of depression came over Denham, an acute ache of misery that heralded a return to normal. It was as though he had had a local anæsthetic in some vital organ, the effects of which were beginning at last to wear off. These stabs of pain were the indications of his return to life.

What did these wretched palms remind him of? Ah, Barcelona, of course. June, 1913. How pretty Christabel had looked in that flowered muslin frock, and her big shady hat. He could see her now

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coming tripping towards him in the sunlight, across the Plaza de Cataluna. Scarcely a dozen years ago that was. Well, she was a liar and faithless, an adept at deception, greedy, cruel and callous. But what did that matter compared with her trick of laughing with her eyes, and the fact that the same things amused them both? The human heart is a queer business, he thought. One can never be quite certain that any wound in it is ever healed.

Chapter iv

"IT's odd how quickly acquaintances ripen by the sea-side," Denham reflected, as one morning about three weeks after his arrival at San Bartolomeo he made his way in from the sea towards a friendly, chattering group who were taking their sun-bath on the beach.

"Nina, *dear* Nina," Veronica was saying, as he approached, "won't you be a darling and come with me to Nice for the week-end? Do. We'll have most awful fun. Bill can stay behind and look after the kids, and Giles can look after Morwenna. Say you will!"

Nina, with a glance out of the corner of her eye at Morwenna, whose face was a blandly smiling mask but whose fingers twitched with agitation, said she would be delighted to do so, later on. "That woman is frightened of me," Nina thought. "She's afraid of my influence over her little sister, and she'll have cause to be before I've done with her."

Morwenna, in a very daring pale-green maillot with a pretty pink cap, looked altogether enchanting, and Denham, in the ecstasy of his admiration, could hardly keep his eyes off her. Every detail of her body, her wrists and ankles, her knees, the contour of her breasts, and, in particular, her extraordinarily beautiful arms, charmed

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and delighted him. The combination which she presented of intellectual distinction and physical loveliness was one new to his experience; and the suggestion of inaccessibility in her manner only heightened her attraction. She was a woman not easily won, but how infinitely well worth winning! Giles and Morwenna were already on terms of friendship, although it was scarcely a fortnight since the Alassio party and less than three weeks since Veronica had struck that symbolic, memorable match. It was queer to remember that such a short time ago the Villa Aurelia had not been on speaking terms with the Villa Teresa and that he, Denham, had not known any member of either household even by sight.

The affability which his two groups of friends showed towards each other, despite the absolute divergence of character and standpoint between Nina and Morwenna, was a source of great satisfaction to Denham. It had been the party at Alassio which had done the trick. Just precisely how it had "done it" Nina realized but Denham did not. Nina had a certain quality of clairvoyance and she had known by instinct exactly what Morwenna had thought, during the early part of the evening, of her penchant for getting picked up by chauffeurs, barbers and other odds and ends of Italian humanity. The disgust natural to an English lady for one who could so demean herself before the best people in the English colony was very strongly there, even if it did not show itself upon the surface. But oddly enough this disgust

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almost vanished later on, when Uncle Fred and Aunt Florrie came over to their adored niece's table, and sat there chatting for a few moments before going home. Nina noticed Morwenna "putting on her charm" and was diverted by the spectacle. "Odious suburban snob!" she thought, "putting on her best manners for a title!" Lady Hillyer, however, thought Morwenna quite delightful, and Sir Frederick was positively gallant. Morwenna saw herself included in their next big party. The competition to be invited to these functions was always a bitter joke—among the unsuccessful competitors. Mrs. Crowley, though she had not met Lady Hillyer—these curious accidents do occasionally happen—had nevertheless the greatest respect for her and was convinced that they would get on splendidly when, in the natural course of things, they encountered one another. Besides, she had so often heard dear Lady Burrows speak of Lady Hillyer, and that made such a bond in common, did it not?

The existence, hitherto unsuspected, of Aunt Florrie put Nina in a different setting from the one which Morwenna, with curious obtuseness, had imagined for her. It was a pity her appearance was so . . . so un-English: and somebody ought to tell her not to paint like a *cocotte* . . . All the same, Morwenna decided, when one looked closely one could not really be mistaken. Whether one liked her or did not like her, one had to admit that she had "caste," that she "belonged." The last was a favorite phrase of Morwenna's. She

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had adopted it during the years when the Crowley family had indubitably been in the best set in Watford. Persons eligible by birth or connections for membership of this exclusive circle were said "to belong" . . .

After Morwenna had recounted to Mrs. Crowley her experiences at the dance, which she did in a carefully-casual voice, with no stressing of points or drawing of inferences, the Villa Aurelia warmed noticeably towards the Villa Teresa. Mrs. Crowley bowed to Nina at their next encounter. Later in the week she patted the head of little Roddy Harding when she encountered him running to the *piccola bottega* to buy his mother a bottle of vermouth, and asked him whether he ought to be out without a hat. More important still, Veronica, now that the Villa Teresa was officially within bounds, flew for it like an arrow from a bow. Bill, and more particularly Nina, seemed able to give her everything of which she had been starved. Generous hospitality, drinks, fun, dancing, naughty stories, a warm welcome and an uncalculating friendliness were what they gladly offered her. Morwenna was forced to follow her impetuous sister, partly because she did not like to be left out of anything, partly from a quasi-maternal watchfulness and jealousy. She was nine years older than Veronica and had exercised unbounded influence over her all her life. She was not going to let that influence be undermined if she could help it.

"Anybody going in to dance to-night?" Bill

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inquired, when he emerged dripping from the waves. "It's a big night at the Lido."

"Do you feel keen, Morwenna?" Giles asked.

"I don't know," said Morwenna, with a pretty gesture that was something between a shrug of the shoulders and a spreading-out of the hands. "I've been going out such a lot lately. I never feel really fresh in the morning if I stay out late and have drinks. I think I'd rather not go in this evening, Giles, if you don't mind."

Giles, already far gone in love, had no desire to be anywhere where his innamorata was not. He also displayed no keenness. Bill seemed indifferent, too. "The girl I most liked dancing with has gone back to England," he remarked. "She sent me a picture-postcard this morning. Rather a sell, because she was just getting ready to give me a nice kiss and find me rather wonderful. Won't you give me a nice kiss, Veronica, and find me rather wonderful, instead?"

Veronica gurgled with amusement. "I'll give you several nice kisses, Bill, but I absolutely decline to find you in the least wonderful. Your hair's not bad, of course . . . But as for the rest of you!"

"Well, I think you are all a lot of slackers," said Nina. "I never saw such a spineless crowd in all my life. I tell you what, Veronica and I will go in together, alone and unprotected. I shall put her under Aunt Florrie's care, and as Aunt Florrie adores the Italian army, we shall have the time of our lives. She shall even dance one dance

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with my own beloved Mario. What do you say, Veronica?"

"You darling!" Veronica cried. "I insist on giving you a hug. It's too sweet of you. And we won't let them change their minds, will we?"

Veronica's face glowed with pleasure. She looked radiant, and Denham caught himself wishing he were fifteen years younger and ardently in love with her. He already felt a vague premonition that to be forty years old and ardently in love with Morwenna was not going to be roses, roses all the way.

Morwenna took Veronica's acceptance of the Alassio invitation with perfect outward composure. Her self-control and her power to prevent herself from showing, by her expression, any sign of pleasure, annoyance, hope, fear, affection or hatred, were points on which she greatly prided herself. "If you come in very late, V., darling, you'll be careful not to wake Mother up, won't you? She sleeps so lightly, and she's had several bad nights, lately."

"Oh, but Veronica must sleep in my house," Nina put in quickly. "I've got a spare room. We'll make a night of it, won't we, Veronica? It sounds like the title of an improving book—'Veronica's First Night Out.'"

"Now, will you shut up?" Nina thought. Morwenna smiled amiably. "Well, that does take rather a weight off my mind, Nina. You see, looking after Mother is more or less my job when

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I'm with her, and her health isn't particularly good . . ."

"Let's go home and have cocktails," said Bill, who was always able to tell the time by his stomach.

"We're always drinking your cocktails," Veronica sighed, "while *we* never have a drink in the house to offer anybody. I think I shall establish a small private bar in the back-garden. What do you say, Mops?"

Morwenna smiled indulgently. Her point of view was that if people offered her food or drink it was because they wished to do so, and that she was merely conferring a favor by accepting. She herself had never offered a man or a woman a drink stronger than tea in the whole of her life, and had no intention of beginning now. She did not wish to do so, and therefore she did not do it. Her position, logically, was unassailable.

It was five minutes' walk under the dusty palm-trees of the Corso Garibaldi to the Villa Teresa and by the time they reached its shady garden everybody was ready for the iced gin and vermouth dispensed by Bill's practiced hand. "I think if I weren't your brother you ought to put me next on your list of husbands, Nina," Bill observed, "if only because of my skill in making drinks. Where exactly *should* I stand, by the way?"

Nina looked at him quizzically for a moment. "I'm not quite sure, Bill, but I *think* you would tie with Garlicky Jim for second place. I admit your drinks are unsurpassed; but Garlicky's tango

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. . . oh, swish! Veronica and I will fight for him to-night!"

"I *do* like men," said Veronica wistfully. "I haven't any complexes, like Morwenna, nor any brains. I know it's awful of me: but one literary person in a family's surely enough."

Nina laughed. "I expect you represent Life, Veronica, while Morwenna merely records it."

"I hope that doesn't mean I'm going to get married at once to a beefy Briton, and then start swarming with young in some awful suburb, like Morwenna's heroines in her ultra-feminist period. That would be simply frightful," groaned Veronica. "Morwenna's heroines, though—while they were great with child and suffering the most brutal indignities from coarse and unworthy husbands—were always dreaming about their unwritten poems, and the Newnham they'd left behind them, and deploring the fact that they had to cut down Daddy's breeches for the baby instead of reading Plato. You know the kind of thing? I could never be like that. I should probably only be regretting all the Garlicky Jims. Morwenna never *could* make me intellectual . . . and she's introduced to me some of her best poets."

"I introduced them, V., because they were good-looking young men," said Morwenna, "and not in their professional capacity. After all, you used to love dancing with Vere Richardson . . ."

"He *is* rather a good poet, for a Georgian," said Nina, whose reading was encyclopædic and whose

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judgment was, as a rule, unerring. "Couldn't he dance?"

"Oh, he *danced* all right," said Veronica, "but he *would* talk to me about in-cred-ibly beautiful pictures, or Baroque churches that were simply too fantastically superb—you know, all by people with difficult names to pronounce—and he looked as if, supposing he *had* tried to kiss me and I had slapped his face, he would have sat down by the waters of Fleet Street and wept into blank verse. I am sure it would have been in-cred-ibly beautiful; but I prefer to be kissed for myself alone. After all, with the ordinary ex-officer type that talks about tennis, and asks you if such-and-such a thing isn't perfectly priceless, in a what-what kind of voice, you do know where you are. But oh, with the Italian officers," sighed Veronica, turning up her eyes, "you so gloriously, so excitingly *don't!* Nina darling, I *am* looking forward to this evening. Do you think I'll have any adventures?"

"They'll queue up for you," said Nina, "and the fascinating Mrs. Harding will be left grinding her perfectly genuine teeth among the wall-flowers . . . Do you think we are very lewd, Morwenna, we two? I know you do, at the bottom of your heart. And so do Giles and Bill at the bottom of theirs."

"We aren't shocked, we are chagrined," said Giles. "The craze that modern women have for Sheiks, cave-men, Rough-stuff Steves and Garlicky Jims naturally makes us register grief, as they say in Movieland. After all, what are we to do about

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it? We offer them our devotion, don't we, Bill? —the priceless treasures of a good man's love, and all the rest of it . . . and they reply by cutting our dances. I don't approve of Englishwomen being allowed to come to Italy, except in very personally conducted parties. It isn't safe. They run wild!"

"Aren't you possessive, poor darling!" Nina mocked. "That's why, although you are such a dear, no woman will ever make you happy. You are possessive but you can't keep. Can *you* imagine Giles giving his wife a really sound and sensible beating, Morwenna?" Nina inquired, innocently. "I know *some one* to whom a sound thrashing would do a world of good," was what she was thinking.

Morwenna laughed shortly. "Giles is much too civilized. Besides, he's not very likely to fall in love with a cave-woman; and the more highly evolved types wouldn't stand it."

Nina bit her lip with irritation. "The more highly evolved types" indeed! With difficulty she repressed the stinging retort which came into her head. "Every woman will stand being kept in order by the man who can do it," she replied, after a pause. "It's an art that all Italians have, hence their dangerous attraction. They don't waste time thinking about it. They act."

"Well, *we* must act, and get along to lunch," said Morwenna, "or Mother will be thinking we are drowned! Come on, V. Have you got the bathing things? Good-by, Nina. Good-by, Bill.

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Good . . . oh, you are coming along with us, Giles? . . . Right you are."

The two girls, followed by Denham, emerged from the garden into the dusty road. Denham wanted his assignation, but Morwenna—for reasons of her own, with which he was not personally concerned—was in one of her moods. She did not want to come to tea. She would not go for a walk after dinner. She would not go out in a boat by moonlight. With the timorousness of a man much in love, he began to feel that he was making himself a bore. And yet it was only yesterday that they had kissed one another for the first time—in the olive-groves above the Oneglia road. What could have happened to account for her sudden change? He recalled—would he ever forget it?—the shyness and tenderness with which she had yielded, the warmth of her lips, the softness of her cheeks and the curious light in her eyes under the moon. After that moment, how was it that she was not as anxious to see him again as he was to see her? There was so much they had to say to one another. His head was full of abortive conversations. When he was alone he poured out to her in imagination all the things with which his heart was full. Why was she now holding him at arm's length? He had met coquettes, he had known capricious and changeable women, but never any one so disconcerting as Morwenna. For upon her sincerity he relied as absolutely as he did upon the strength of her character, her rectitude, her meticulous sense of honor, her unstained chastity. She was not a

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light woman, not a woman to treat a man (so he supposed) with wanton cruelty. . . .

Depressed and upset, he took his leave of Morwenna and Veronica at the door of their villa, and walked slowly back to his *pension*, under the burning sun.

Chapter v

“MY story about *me*” usually forms the bulk of the conversation when friendships are young, and Denham was the kind of man to whom people talk about themselves easily and frankly. He was genuinely interested and an excellent audience. In a few weeks’ time, therefore, Nina, Bill and Morwenna had all told him the silent facts about themselves, as edited by their respective temperaments. Morwenna’s life-story was, of the three, the most uneventful. Her father had been a “merchant” (store-keeper?) in Singapore, had made money and retired to Watford, had lost the greater part of his fortune by unwise speculations and had died untimely, leaving his family, a son and three daughters, ill provided for. The son, Francis, was a solicitor in the city, and lived at Wimbledon. Hetty, Morwenna’s junior by two years, had married a clergyman with a living in Somerset. But he was no ordinary clergyman, he was “county.” Was he not the Lord of the Manor of Beauchamp Mallet, as well as its Rector? Morwenna had a curious talent, in discussing her relatives and friends, for subtly claiming for them the most exalted social status. Denham, who was unaccustomed to bother his head about such matters and accepted people as he found them, was puzzled by this insistence

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on a gentility that was not, so far as he was aware, suspect. Francis, for example, was no ordinary, common-or-garden solicitor: he graced a business long associated with the Crowley family, a fact deemed enough, in itself, to give the firm prestige. Morwenna's snobberies were as a rule infinitely subtle because she had a subtle brain; they were quite subtle enough, for the most part, to escape the notice of the infatuated Denham. Something about her reference to the married sister who was "county"—and who was expected, with her husband, at San Bartolomeo in a few weeks' time—did, however, stick in his gizzard. He wished Morwenna wouldn't. He didn't pretend to be anything much himself, but, damn it all, he had a few respectable relatives too, if it came to that. Most people had. And what did it matter, anyway, in the case of a woman like Morwenna?

There was Newnham in Morwenna's life: that he had already guessed. Newnham from about 1910 to 1913, following on a brilliant career at a Girls' High School. Then the Suffrage, of course. "Man-made laws!" "Women, until recent years, have never had an opportunity of developing their minds, like men." Her deep rancor against men in general seemed always to be concentrated upon Denham whenever Morwenna touched these topics. And yet she was by no means a woman who went through life indifferent to the opposite sex . . . Friends had seen her dash hastily to the looking-glass when a male was observed upon her doorstep. "Thank God the darling paints and uses a lip-stick

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and dresses prettily," Denham reflected. "There's no sign of the blue-stocking in her appearance." There wasn't. No one, meeting Morwenna for the first time, would guess that she was a well-known novelist. Her first success had come to her very soon after her Cambridge days, and since then she had steadily improved her position. She employed a secretary when she was at home in her Hampstead flat, to whom she dictated every morning. At San Bartolomeo she was not doing very much writing. She was working things out in her head, pondering a new book in a style different from anything she had previously attempted. At this point in her confidences she shut the door in Denham's face, rather ostentatiously. He was annoyed because he had not been inquisitive and he had shown no desire to pry into the sacred mysteries of her craft. Her heart was a different matter. On this subject he was entitled to display an interest, since he had given his own into her keeping and had certainly not been discouraged from so doing. From what she let fall he gathered that she was physically unawakened, and that she had never been very deeply stirred emotionally. "Men have been running after me since I was sixteen," she once remarked, and Denham could see that she was telling no more than the truth. Two of her affairs had got as far as an engagement, both of which she had broken off. "I have moments when I long for a child," she once said. "I suppose every woman has. But my work comes first."

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"But how can you write with real first-hand knowledge of human nature," Denham protested, "if you avoid all the normal human experiences?"

Morwenna regarded him with a pitying smile. "The pursuit of experience is the last resort of the unimaginative," she quoted. "I never heard that Emily Brontë or Christina Rossetti wrote any the worse because they didn't have husbands and babies."

"They were very passionate women," Denham observed, reflectively. "So much anybody can tell from their work, which has behind it the impetus of intense emotion thwarted of its natural outlet . . ." He broke off, but what he thought was, "My dear, have you the capacity to love as those women could love; or are you cold and self-centered and absorbed in the personality of Morwenna Crowley? I wish to goodness you'd get just a tiny bit absorbed in the personality of Giles Denham!" A feeling of hopelessness overcame him, which he recognized was the certain prelude to failure. But how could he compete with Morwenna's art, if she insisted on maintaining that marriage would ruin her career? He hadn't "an earthly." And again, more than most women Morwenna seemed to be affected by a man's personal appearance. She went into almost indecent raptures over some of the young Italians she saw bathing, and raved about their backs, their arms, their legs, their rippling muscles, and so forth. He wasn't too ugly as men go, but he was no Adonis; he was getting slightly pot-bellied

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and he was forty. Even when she kissed him lightly on the lips, and put her adorable arm round his neck and said, "Dear Giles, I'm very, very fond of you," he knew at the bottom of his heart that he hadn't a chance. But he went on wooing, as Morwenna intended that he should. . . .

In Veronica Denham, though he did not suspect it, had a friend whose fidelity never wavered and whose tact was inspired by affection and insight. For all her lightness and gayety Veronica was no fool, and she had the great gift of grace, a quality which more than any other arouses in men a feeling of gratitude. Denham found himself drifting into a quasi-paternal attitude towards her, which was not unnatural in view of his relations with Morwenna. She talked to him like a confiding child—not that she had very much to confide. A few flirtations, one bad fright when she had almost yielded to an Italian soldier for whom she did not really care, were the only incidents in her life which seemed to her worth recalling. Like the majority of the girls of her generation, Veronica looked her own desires and impulses in the face. She was eager for love, and until such time as she found it, she enjoyed her flirtations. Of what are termed morals she did not seem to possess a trace. In their place was a natural fastidiousness, and a certain honesty of conduct that was wholly admirable, although—from the Victorian standpoint—it was not entirely ladylike. "I'm afraid you aren't a lady, Veronica," Denham once

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remarked to her, "but you are certainly a gentleman!"

In Nina Harding Denham became the more interested the more he saw of her. He gathered glimpses of a girlhood spent partly in a tumble-down country house near Mullingar in Ireland, and partly in a convent school in the Isle of Wight. At twenty she had made an absurd marriage, and had run away from her husband an hour after the ceremony. Then she had her first love affair, which the war brought to an untimely close. "A dear fool, over six feet high, and we were both as innocent as two lambs! I made him take me to live with him. I don't believe he would have done it, if I hadn't, and we were very happy for a time. But we hadn't anything much to talk about! In fact we were incredibly young. We shouldn't have gone on being happy together if he had lived. It wouldn't have lasted." After some adventurous years in London, during which she had turned her hand to half a dozen different things—journalism, the stage, secretarial work and so forth—in order to make a living, she had met Hugo Harding and, after the divorce proceedings, had married him. He was a successful doctor, with consulting-rooms in Harley Street. Their flat was in a turning off Baker Street. Denham could guess something of the domestic situation. The husband patient and reserved, unimaginative, watchful and very jealous of his wife's popularity; the wife, with her nerves strained sometimes to breaking-point, letting off steam by going to dances, filling the flat with her

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many friends and occasionally, out of sheer naughtiness, pretending a looseness of conduct which had no existence in reality. Denham could visualize the Harding ménage as clearly as if he were a member of it. Harding, poor wretch, as Nina often observed, was so *English*. Oh, so enragingly, exasperatingly English! "I've borne him four children that any father ought to be proud of—look at them, did you ever see such children?—and I've run his home decently for him, brought him numberless friends, acted as his secretary, been careful of his money and of his reputation. I've done my job decently, Giles, really I have . . . And I deserve a holiday and an allowance. He knows I won't leave my babies. I was bred in a convent. Oh, God! if you could only realize what that means! But I can't help the way I'm made. I suppose I'm the sort of woman who ought to be thrashed at intervals. And Hugo can't do it. He only spies, and watches, and waits and says nothing. I had to come away. My nerves simply went to pieces, and my heart's all wrong. He let Bill come with me—like giving the butler the key of the wine-cellar, you know. And here we are . . ."

"And what is going to happen, Nina?"

"God knows. Probably some Italian tick will come along and play the cave-man on your poor little Nina. My dear, what fools men are not to realize why all these sheik novels are so popular with women . . ."

"But seriously?"

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"Oh, seriously, when Bill and I have worn our hearts out, got on one another's nerves and had the unforgivable scene, I shall go back to Hugo. But of course I shall go back, in any case. Hugo's so helpless. And anyway he's my husband and the father of my babies. But oh, if I could *only* have a holiday from him, for a year or two, and try to make Bill happy!"

"Are you very fond of Bill?" Giles inquired on one occasion. "By the way," he added, "I never thought for a moment that he was really your brother." "Nor does any one else in San Bartolomeo," said Nina, "but they don't know *for certain* that he isn't, and that makes all the difference. Actually, apart from the question of physical attraction, our relationship is rather like what might exist between brother and sister. We know each other, you see, so awfully well. There's something rather terrifying and disastrous about complete intimacy. Yes, Bill and I care for each other rather a lot. We couldn't live together like this, with a drawn sword between us, if we didn't."

"No," said Giles. "There is a good deal in that."

In Bill Hepburn, Giles often thought he saw the perfect husband, a fact which made the situation at the Villa Teresa all the more heartrending. Bill was a curiously single-minded man, with a sweetness and gentleness of disposition which made it out of the question for him to attempt to carry Nina by assault. And Giles, as a looker-on, could see very clearly that Nina wanted to be carried

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by assault—and battery. Bill had resigned from the army after the war, with the rank of captain, and now eked out his income by free-lance journalism. He was a fine linguist, speaking French, German and Italian with equal fluency, an expert boxer and an authority on Baroque art. He was also a man of unusually pure life, with the bawdiest tongue that Giles had ever encountered in all his experience. And every night and every morning, after cleaning his teeth, he knelt down by his bedside and said the Lord's Prayer. When Giles once referred to this practice, Bill replied: "It's a habit I got into as a boy. My old guv'nor always used to do it. It keeps one's swank down a bit to remind oneself now and then that there is an Authority whose word goes. I always believe in bein' civil to one's superiors, don't you know! Have you heard the one about the young man of Lahore, whose . . ."

"*Aren't* people odd!" Denham thought. "Human beings are the strangest mixture! I wish I had a knack for writing . . . What fun Morwenna must have . . ."

Chapter vi

IT was with little expectation that she would agree to his proposal that Denham, taking his courage in both hands, asked Morwenna to go away with him for a fortnight into the mountains. San Bartolomeo was getting too hot for comfort, and the reports of the cool green valleys high up in the Ligurian Alps, of the invigorating air and exquisite mountain scenery, which had come to his ears from time to time, were extraordinarily enticing. If only she would come!

They were in the olive groves, among the hills at the back of the Villa Aurelia, when Denham made his suggestion, and time and place were well chosen. It was about ten o'clock at night, and from where they lay together, in the long dry grass, they could gaze down at the glittering pathway made by the full moon across the dreaming sea. Above them, below them and all around them the queer shapes of the olive trees were silhouetted against the sky; and as a background to their conversation was the persistent friendly croaking of the frogs. From having detested this noise Denham, after two years of wandering along the shores of the Mediterranean, had grown accustomed to it and at last had come to like it. The poor frogs! Their voices were not melodious, but surely

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they were entitled to use them with the rest of God's creatures.

"Morwenna, my darling," Denham murmured. "I'm ordinary flesh-and-blood, dear, even if you aren't . . . We can't go on like this. Let us go away together into the mountains. Haven't you said 'no' to life for long enough . . . ? You know you have promised to marry me, except for your 'ifs' and 'whens'!"

In the moonlight, Morwenna's face with its thin nose and pointed chin and lips slightly parted looked youthful and mysterious and yet, at the same time, curiously prim. That inimitable characteristic primness! His arms were round her and his head was pillowed on her breast. She bent over him, gave him a light, half-maternal kiss on the top of his head, and began with a caressing gesture to ruffle his hair. "You always want things cut-and-dried and settled and arranged, don't you!" she said teasingly. "You are all wrong, you know. Things just happen. You can't force them. And if I go away with you, what am I to say to my mother and Veronica . . . ?"

"Why say anything, dear? You are a mature woman and not a young girl. You are not dependent on anybody. You stand on your own two pretty feet. You haven't any need to explain your actions."

Perhaps it was the beauty of the evening combined with an unwonted uprush of normal sentiment, of delight in being adored and made much of; perhaps it was a desire to show these

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people who sneered at her so for being Victorian and circumspect, that in her own way, when the occasion justified it, she was bold enough to defy convention; perhaps it was mere curiosity at last breaking through her defenses, curiosity to share the common experience and to find out for herself whether there was "anything in it"; perhaps it was a combination of all these thoughts and impulses, which spurred her to a sudden decision. The decision when made surprised herself almost as much as it surprised Denham.

"Very well, you old silly, if you really want me to, I'll come away with you for ten days. I've just remembered that Mother is taking Veronica to Rapallo, to stay with some friends. They start to-morrow week. We can go the day after . . . if you like. There, my dear! If it doesn't work out right, and if it makes you more unhappy than happy, don't blame me. I'm the woman God made me and I can't alter my nature to please you . . ."

Denham's emotion was so great that he was scarcely able to speak. He had not believed it possible that, at his age, he could ever again feel so strongly. But his love for Morwenna seemed to combine all the ardor of youthful passion with the reasoned affection of maturity, and, in addition, he had for her that fine sensual appreciation which is one of the great gifts of *l'âge mûr*. In the curve of her breast, in the silken delicacy of her skin, in the magnetic quality of her lightest touch, he saw a promise of the most complete and the most pure expression of what he believed was the greatest

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love that had ever come into his life or ever would come into it, provided that he could awaken in Morwenna an answering warmth. The surrender to the god would have to be absolute, on both sides . . . Even in this moment of triumphant happiness he was conscious of a chill of fear. But no—Nature herself would save them, Nature would triumph over all Morwenna's sophistications, repressions and adopted attitudes. . . .

When he looked at her and saw her face white in the moonlight and her glistening eyes, he knew that for these moments at any rate she was very woman. The distinguished novelist, to become whose secretary would be considered a very great privilege by numbers of highly educated girls; the rather frightening personality who made her presence felt at literary tea-parties and knew her own value to a nicety; the reserved, controlled, prim, spinsterish figure of everyday life—none of these was recognizable in the almost childish creature who curled so readily into his embrace, was pleased and calmed and made happy by his caresses, and drank his constant kisses as if indeed her lips were thirsty for them. Such a revelation of Morwenna's emotional possibilities could not but reassure him that all would be well with them, once the Rubicon was crossed. . . .

Denham would gladly have spent the whole night in the olive groves with his beloved, and when Morwenna said she must go back to the Villa Aurelia he begged her to wait and watch the sun rise over the sea. "You have your key, and your

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mother and Veronica will be fast asleep. They won't know, dearest," he pleaded. "Stay with me! It is so wonderful here . . ." But, with the gesture of departure, bits of the "personality" rushed back to take possession of Morwenna. The distinguished novelist, banished unwontedly, resumed her sway over the woman. The controls and the repressions and the primnesses took up again their respective posts, and the woman seeking fulfillment was overpowered and imprisoned once again in the crystal cabinet of Morwenna's heart.

"No, I must get back, my dear. I've stayed out much too late as it is. I have a lot of things I must do to-morrow . . . a whole heap of reviews to get off."

Denham always felt powerless before the Morwenna who was the resolute professional woman, the determined careerist. With the masculine side of her character, into which the feminine side of his gave him a curiously clear insight, he felt a sickening inability to hold his own.

They scrambled slowly along the rocky pathway which led down the hillside to the Oneglia road. On their way they passed an orange-tree white with blossom, the scent of which filled the air with fragrance. Denham broke off two tiny sprays and gave one to Morwenna. "Isn't it the loveliest smell imaginable!" he exclaimed. But perfumes meant very little to Morwenna—her olfactory sense was defective—and she made a perfunctory rejoinder. So there was no way into the stronghold of her

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memories like that: it was one of the many points of difference between them. . . .

When they reached the long white ribbon of the high road which skirted the shore, following the lovely curve of the bay of San Bartolomeo, Denham had a sudden inspiration. "Let's have a bathe, Morwenna," he cried. "No one will see if we creep round the shore towards the mole."

Morwenna's eyes shone. She looked at the sea with parted lips,—the beloved sea, the mystic element! Once again the "distinguished novelist" side of her personality was pushed into the background, and the essential Morwenna emerged from her hiding-place. "Come on, then!" she said, taking him by the arm. "We'll go to that little bay beyond our house. It is quite deserted and no one will see us."

They stepped over the parapet on to the sand and went down to the water's edge, and while they walked along the shore Denham was thinking: "Nina, with all her insight, doesn't really understand Morwenna. She doesn't know *this* side of her, anyway." And not for the first time it occurred to him that Morwenna's baffling complexities were due to the fact that her life had been divided between those two astonishingly different periods, the pre-war and the post-war period. While they drew nearer to the spot for which they were making, Morwenna's whole being was filled with a hungry thrill of sensual anticipation. She was like a maid running to keep an appointment with her lover, and she was barely conscious of

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Denham's presence by her side. "There's a rock we can dive from," she observed, dreamily, after he had made some remark to which she had not listened. "My hair will get in an awful state," she added, thinking aloud, "but it doesn't matter. I can wash it out in the morning." Arrived at the little bay, Morwenna tore her clothes off with the eagerness of a schoolboy, in her haste to get into the sea. For a moment—was it a calculated moment?—she stood poised on the rock, looking down into the water. Her body gleamed in the moonlight, and Denham thought that in all his life he had never seen anything so beautiful. There was a quick splash as she dived cleanly into the water, keeping her legs well together. Denham followed a few moments later, and they swam out slowly in the path of the moon. The water was like warm milk, and when they floated on their backs their bodies shone silver-white. Taking his cue from his companion, Denham swam in silence by her side. She seemed untiring. On and on she went, towards the open sea. Giles had been a strong swimmer in his youth, but his circulation was indifferent, and after a time his teeth began to chatter and he grew frightened of getting cramp. But he did not like to admit defeat. Eventually, much to his chagrin, he was forced to cry out to tell her that he was turning back. She waved to him and continued swimming. "Not bad for the prim Victorian spinster!" he thought, with a spasm of pride, as he made slowly for the shore. "She swims like a fish." But the word which had come

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into his brain worried him. "Like a fish? Fish, flesh, fowl—or good red herring?" Bless her, whatever she was, she was adorable . . . His thoughts began to dwell in the future. He would resume the practice of his profession . . . In a year or two he might be doing as well as ever. Where to live? He would see if he could pick up one of those little Queen Anne houses in Westminster. Morwenna would be delighted. Oh, yes, he could easily knock up two or three thousand a year if there was something to do it for. And they'd have a daughter, *subito!* Her muscles couldn't be too much set, with all that swimming. She was in perfect condition . . . It would have to be a daughter . . . he wanted one so badly.

Denham crawled painfully over the pebbles to where he had left his shirt and trousers, dried himself a little with his pocket-handkerchief, and then remembered that Morwenna would want it. So he spread it out on a rock near her clothes. Then he slipped on his things, searched in a pocket for one of the little buff-colored packets of Macedonia cigarettes and began to smoke. . . .

Yes, it would have to be a girl, and she would take after Morwenna. Funny to be back in London again. But with a wife like Morwenna all his old confidence would come back. The wound was pretty nearly healed in any case. He began to think about Christabel . . . the early days. They had got on so well, until she had developed the craze for bridge and backing horses, followed by drink. Lord, what she had been like, when she was tight!

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The scenes! He wondered how many times she had made him a cuckold before he tumbled to it. Archie, for example, his old friend? Had there ever been anything between her and Archie? Not that it mattered much now, anyway. And it would be more comfortable not to know. Archie was a decent sort, one of the few men friends for whom he sometimes felt a need. But Christabel might at least have gone off with a—well, with a gentleman—may as well be frank—as with that damned skunk of a nonconformist stock-jobber. The lies about him which the fellow had stuck about London, too! Why the dickens couldn't they let him be? Mr. Biddle—Golly, what a name!—had seduced Chrissy while he was helpless in that nursing-home, and between the two of them they'd done their level best to smash his career and damn well break him up. Why the devil couldn't they leave him alone, now? They'd got their divorce. These bloody Baptists and their consciences! This Biddle was forever trying to excuse his adultery to his friends by making him out to be every known sort of blackguard and cad and painting himself as a sort of Sir Galahad. Only the other day, those people at San Remo had obviously heard the stock-jobber's yarn. What the devil was a chap to do about it? Anything or nothing?

"Hullo! Here you are, darling! You must have swum about a mile and a half!" Morwenna rose like a mermaid out of the sea, and stood in front of Denham, panting slightly for breath, her body gleaming and glistening in the moonlight.

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In a flash Biddle and all the rest of his morbid reminiscences of the receding past, went out of Denham's mind. Here indeed was all beauty, all loveliness; a figure—to his romantic imagination—with the tenderness and glamour of a Solveig, one who would take his hand and lead him along a pathway full of sweetness, light and worthy aspiration; one who would make him whole again, inspire him to fresh endeavor, bring him back to life . . . He gazed at her with such a fire of devotion in his eyes that Morwenna was at once proud, frightened and a little ashamed of herself. He took her cool wet body in his arms and kissed her slowly and tenderly.

“Sentimental old idiot!” said Morwenna, disentangling herself. “Lend me that great big hanky of yours. I believe I could have swum as far as Africa!”

Chapter vii

A LOVE of pubs and of the common people who frequent them was one of Nina Harding's most attractive characteristics. She had a *flair* for "low life." In London her knowledge of how the poor enjoy themselves was extensive and peculiar. She knew all the places in Poplar, Stepney and Limehouse where one could dance for sixpence; and her *répertoire* of stories, grim, humorous or tragic, culled from chance conversations in saloon bars, must have gained for her a notable success in the Neil Lyons vein, had she had the application to write them down. Nothing more clearly revealed her as the aristocrat, *fine de race*, than her immediate acceptance, everywhere, by the working-classes. Her absorbed interest in humanity, her appreciation of character, her keen and at the same time robust and Rabelaisian sense of humor, her freedom from condescension and her quick understanding enabled her to become intimate with her servants, her charwoman, her greengrocer or her dustman without losing their respect, or incurring that concealed detestation which so often falls to the lot of the kind-hearted middle-class woman anxious to do good. In the lower strata of the London Boxing world she had also an extensive acquaintance. Bermondsey Kids, Battling Bens, a whole

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circle of minor bruisers, together with their trainers, received her as a good pal, regaled her with their stories, and invited her to their sparring-matches. Her capacity to gain the affection of the under-dog, which added so much color and interest to her life in London, Nina took with her wherever she went. When she traveled abroad, porters, 'bus-conductors, Douane officials, policemen, even station-masters, stretched points to make things easy for her, after a few moments' conversation, which the most lavishly tipping of millionaires could not obtain with all their bribes.

There are, perhaps, in all Europe no more acute psychologists, no more unerring readers of character than the Italians; and the affection of an Italian is worth winning. The things which Nina managed to do, with impunity, at San Bartolomeo appalled and amazed the other English residents, who could not understand her popularity with the townsfolk. She was always "letting down the prestige of the English" by spending her evenings in the more proletarian bars and *caffès*, drinking and smoking in the company of cab-drivers, and shop-assistants, in fact, with the lower orders generally. Yet her Italian servant was devoted to her, worked harder than any other Italian servant dreamt of working for an English signora, and scarcely robbed her at all; while the townspeople not only liked her and were intensely diverted by her vagaries and pranks, but showed, in various subtle ways, that they accepted her as one who, in her own country, belonged to the

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noblesse. To Morwenna, who had lived for some months in San Bartolomeo without either knowing or caring anything at all about the intimate life of the little town—who had lived there in a purely English atmosphere, scarcely regarding the shop-keepers with whom she dealt, or the servant who cooked for her, as being more than automata who supplied things and were paid for it—Nina Harding's "goings on" among the Italians aroused nothing but contempt. Her attitude was, perhaps, partly due to an inherited taint. The late Mr. Crowley had been in business in Madras, before going to Singapore, and held views about "natives," the "British Raj" and the superiority of his own race to every other, of such an appalling crudity that even the most hard-bitten Anglo-Indian Colonel would have been ashamed to own them. When Nina started to infect Veronica with what she regarded as a taste for squalid dissipation, Morwenna's secret anger knew no bounds. Not a trace of this showed in her manner, however, either to her sister or to Nina.

The dance at Alassio had been, from Morwenna's standpoint, the all-important first step in Veronica's downfall. After that her descent had the swiftness of a *glissade*. She could not be kept away from Nina. Evening after evening they went out together on what Bill described as a "*caffè-crawl*." At first Morwenna had insisted on going too—partly to keep an eye on Giles who, to her disgust, seemed to accept that kind of thing as being perfectly natural and amusing—but chiefly in the

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hope that Veronica would show enough right feeling to follow her ladylike example and express her disapproval. But Morwenna's efforts to introduce a genteel chill on these otherwise gay occasions were as unavailing as were her subtle appeals to Veronica to be true to her traditions. Veronica, good-hearted and affectionate as she was, was also very consciously twenty-three and very determinedly "post-war." She knew, instinctively, that she was fighting for life against the kind of death-in-life represented by her home. She was fighting to get out of prison. Morwenna had to own herself defeated. But since it was only human, in the circumstances, that she should hurt somebody, she let off steam by hurting Giles.

About a week after the night when Morwenna had promised Giles to go away with him into the mountains, Nina asked Veronica to dinner, and after dinner the two of them walked round to the Bar Ligure. Both Morwenna and Giles had been invited, but both on different pretexts had refused. Bill Hepburn had gone to Alassio for the night. "I say, Veronica, whatever is the matter with Giles?" Nina asked, when the elderly proprietor, with an engaging smile of welcome, had brought them each a "*caffè espresso*" and a *bicchierino* of Strega. "I never saw such a change in any one. His nerves have all gone to bits, poor dear."

"Oh, I don't know," Veronica replied, with a troubled expression on her face. Then, after a pause, she added, "That's a lie, I *do* know. You see, Giles doesn't understand Mops as I do, and

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he takes things frightfully to heart. Mops is a wonderful creature and I admire her no end, but she's awfully funny in some ways—I suppose because she's a genius and that kind of thing—and I don't think she realizes how devoted Giles is to her . . . or what it *feels* like to be in love with a person. I don't think she's ever been in love for more than a few days at a time. She is what, if it were any one else, one would call a coquette."

"I know what *I'd* call her," Nina reflected.

"The last man she was engaged to was completely knocked out. I think something awful happened to him. Anyway, he took to drink and lost his job and disappeared. I was only seventeen when it all happened, but I remember it very clearly because I liked him. I always do like Morwenna's men! She played with him so that the poor wretch never knew where he was, from one day to the other. And then when she got tired of it, she wrote him a sweet 'sensible' letter and broke it off. I expect that's what she'll do to Giles eventually.

"Giles is very secretive about the whole business," said Nina. "A few days ago he was simply radiant, and hinted that he and Morwenna had fixed things up. Since then he hasn't said anything about her, and goes around with a face as long as a house."

"I think something rather serious *did* happen," Veronica replied. "I don't quite know what. Probably they got engaged or agreed to live together, or something like that. Morwenna is such

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a queer mixture? She has absolutely Victorian ideas about monogamy and the wickedness of divorce . . . and yet, with one-half of her brain she talks and writes about trial marriages—without the ceremony—and free unions and so on. I don't know what she really does believe on those subjects and I don't think she knows, herself. Anyway, the morning after her great scene with Giles, she had a violent reaction, and I could see by her face that she had one of her cold fits on. Of course poor Giles, when he turned up to bathe, couldn't make it out. Morwenna was like an iceberg. I heard him suggest coming round after dinner, but Mops said she wanted to read, or something like that. It *was* rather bad luck, because whenever Mops gets sick of Anna's bad cooking and wants a good dinner she always goes and dines with Giles at the Paradiso. But except on the famous occasion when we first met him, she has never once invited him to the house. When she does allow him to come, at his own request, she never dreams of offering him even a glass of water. I was so annoyed and ashamed on one occasion that I ran out to the *piccola bottega* and bought him some bad Marsala. Mops was awfully fed up, and I suppose it *was* rather rotten of me; but I simply couldn't bear it . . .”

“How odd people are,” Nina mused. “Whenever I've come anywhere near being engaged to a man, I have always expected my lover either to write or see me every day; and I suffered frightfully if he didn't. I suppose Morwenna's method pays

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best, though . . . if she wants to reduce Giles to subjection."

"Morwenna believes in matriarchy," Veronica observed. "And if she ever marries it will be to realize her own conception of herself as a matriarch. She does honestly think that women are going to boss the show in future, because they are more courageous and more spiritual and more refined than men, and their brains are just as good and they have the sacred task of continuing the race, etc."

"If she'd borne four healthy children and nursed them all herself," snorted Nina, "she would not talk such, well, balderdash! 'The sacred task of continuing the race,' as she calls it, is an exhausting physical function, to which a woman who is worth her salt can add all the brainwork of which she is capable, without having any left over to waste on doing men's jobs for them. Most women, I admit, despise men for their characteristic idiocies and weaknesses, just as men despise us for ours. A little healthy loathing of each other keeps both sexes up to the scratch." Privately Nina wondered why it was that the women who had least to give in the way of loyalty and affection always demanded from men the highest price. In Paris, the successful prostitutes were always completely frigid and, emotionally, as hard as nails, so she had heard. Certainly in the world—as opposed to the half-world—the women who exploited men most advantageously to themselves were of that type. She wished this Giles and Morwenna business

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had not happened. It was bound, she felt, to end in disaster. Giles, like most sensitive Englishmen, had too much of the female in his composition to be able to break and remold a woman like Morwenna, whose only hope of sexual fulfillment lay in her encountering a "sheik." Sheiks were rather an obsession of Nina's. "I think Morwenna ought to marry an Italian," she observed. "In Italy there is no divorce, and she would like that. And the woman is absolutely in her husband's power; and that would be good for her. If an Italian wife goes to live with another man, she can be sent to prison for ten years if the husband wishes it. But if the husband wants to turn her and her children out of his home he can call the carabinieri to help him show them the door. Not that the men ever require outside help. I've known an Italian husband beat his wife with a razor-strop till she screamed, simply because she raised a mild objection to receiving his advances. I've known another who bit his wife's thumb till the blood spurted. They stand no nonsense, either from their wives or their mistresses. If I were married to an Italian," she added, with a regretful sigh, "I should have been knifed, ages ago."

"But they have pretty manners to their wives, in public," Veronica remarked. She had been rather abashed by Nina's revelations because, in her day-dreams, she had more than once played with the possibility of marrying an Italian. "Oh yes," said Nina. "The 1880 manners that Morwenna likes so much and thinks so gentleman-

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like, but done with any amount of finesse and charm. The consideration they show their women-folk is exquisite: that is the reverse of the medal. Personally, as you know, I adore them . . ."

"You know you love blood, Nina darling," said Veronica, with one of her flashes of insight. "I believe you'd drink a pint of warm blood every morning before breakfast, if you got the chance. Whenever you talk about either boxing or bull-fights your eyes sparkle!"

"That's because I'm a simple, modest, unspoiled woman," said Nina, with an excruciating simper. "You mustn't forget that I learnt fine sewing at my convent and how to bathe in my drawers, to hold my back straight, and, in fact, to behave in all the ways that gentlemen consider attractive and correct. None of your damned sophistications about *me*, ducky. I like a man to be a man, and I adore watching a fight. A good 'needle' fight, with plenty of blood-letting, is one of the most thrilling spectacles that Nature can provide us with. There's something elemental and grand about it. Once when I was walking through Blenheim Park, when the ground was covered with snow, I saw a stoat catch a rabbit. It bit the rabbit's neck and a spurt of bright crimson blood . . ."

"Oh, don't!" Veronica protested.

"You are too civilized, old top!" laughed Nina. "That's your trouble. I appreciate the things in life that are essential, like the lusts to procreate and to overcome. They may be raw and cruel and

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terrible, but they have the purity of fire. And they are great mysteries, like the sacraments. Yes, I'd sooner go to a bull-fight than play tennis at Putney!" Nina concluded, shaking her tousled mass of brown curls and lighting a fresh cigarette. "I hate tepidity and clamminess."

At this moment Giles Denham walked into the Bar and hailed them. The proprietor rushed to shake him by the hand and to provide him with a chair. The Bar came suddenly to life. Ernesto, the cab-driver, entered, flashed his glittering white teeth and his blazing black eyes when he perceived his signora, and joined two of his friends in a far corner. After him followed a burly man in white ducks, with a dark-brown complexion and a ludicrously repulsive leer. He enveloped Nina and Veronica in a lewd stare and licked his lips, then went to the far end of the bar and sat by himself. The bar-keeper gave him the faintest of nods, and picked up his pink sporting paper. Another arrival was an Italian officer *en vacances* with whom Nina, to Bill's exasperation, had for some weeks been carrying on a dangerous flirtation. He was a squat, rather thick-set man, with a face of great beauty and sleepy, subtle black eyes. His hair was black and smooth, his complexion ivory-white. The padrone brought him a chair, and with Latin abstemiousness he refused a drink and accepted an ice. Giles had a brandy-and-soda, which Nina surmised was not the first that he had consumed since dinner. Not that he showed any signs of having fortified himself against the effects of

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Morwenna's tortuous moods: Nina merely divined it from his mask of good-humor.

The soldier's name was Benedetto Reggolo and Giles had heard a great deal about him from Nina. His exploits were indeed famous. He had on one occasion frog-marched an impertinent carabinieri back to his own barracks and given him in charge. On several others he had been arrested for assault and battery, a fact which naturally endeared him to Nina. He was also the author of a line of English poetry which had become one of the classics of Bill and Nina's répertoire:—

"I kicka my friend on the fatta-backa-side, at the foota-balla match last week."

Benedetto gave a glance at the lewd individual in the corner of the room and looked away again hastily.

"Do you know who that is?" Nina whispered. "It's the *uomo nudo!*" Benedetto nodded his head. "I know," he said.

The story was that the man, who was supposed to be mad, had the habit of exhibiting himself at night, unclothed, in the outlying parts of the town. The carabinieri had pretended to be chasing him for weeks, but to show his contempt for them he appeared regularly in the *caffès* of San Bartolomeo. So redoubtable was his reputation for strength that they did not dare to touch him. Whenever he was seen in the streets people whispered, "There goes the '*uomo nudo,*'" and he was used as a bogey

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to frighten the children into good behavior. The local photographer, accompanied by two stalwarts, had once distinguished himself by making a gallant if unauthorized effort to catch the "*uomo nudo*" "at it." He was fat and he was mustachioed, nevertheless he cast himself for the part of unsophisticated girlhood and decided to act as a decoy. Borrowing his wife's white nightdress and covering his face and his mustache with flour, the gallant man, accompanied by his friends, stationed himself under some olive-trees by the side of a pathway leading up into the hills. In his hand he held a powerful electric torch. He waited a long time. At last there came a footstep. Trembling with excitement, the artist assumed a coy attitude and waited breathless till the stranger came abreast of him. Then with a shout he and his friends dashed forward, and a stream of light was directed against the night-prowling ruffian—who turned out to be a harmless domestic servant going home to bed. She rushed away, screaming, "*l'uomo nudo!*" at the top of her voice and was with difficulty caught and pacified. Still, the effort, if unsuccessful, showed more spirit than had been displayed by the carabinieri.

The "*uomo nudo*" knew quite well that he was being discussed, and showed his yellow teeth in a disgusting grin. The conversation turned to other topics, and became animated. Benedetto, in his excitement, called Nina constantly by her name, in rather a high-pitched voice. The "*uomo nudo*" imitated him, in a highly insulting manner. Den-

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ham, the usual sentimental Englishman in a case of the kind, assumed that something would happen and began to brace himself for the task of assisting Benedetto in a scene of bloodshed. But he had reckoned without the practical common-sense of the Latin mind. After some moments he looked at Benedetto and then turned his eyes quickly towards the "*uomo nudo*." "Isn't that fellow—er—trying to be impertinent?" he asked, in a voice too low for Nina or Veronica, who were talking to one another, to hear.

"Yes, but I am afraid of that man," was Benedetto's reply. Benedetto knew the madman's weight to a kilo, and wasn't having any.

The party broke up soon afterwards, and it was while they were walking towards the Villa Teresa, which was on the way to the Villa Aurelia, that Nina saw the first signs of Denham's agitation. He had certainly kept himself extraordinarily well in hand if he were really "going through it." But there was more than a trace too much eagerness in his offer to see Veronica to her door. Nina guessed Denham's anxiety lest Benedetto should tack on to them, and saved the situation by asking him in to play poker—a game for which he had a passion—with herself and Miss Wigsworth.

Veronica and Denham walked on together with more haste than seemed absolutely necessary. When they came to the point where the windows of the Villa Aurelia became visible she heaved a sigh of relief. Her mother had gone to her room but Morwenna was still up. "I see Mops hasn't gone

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to bed yet," she observed reassuringly. Denham had seen it too, and his face in the darkness wore a boyish grin of satisfaction. "You'll come in, won't you? It's quite early."

Denham slipped his arm through Veronica's and drew her close to him. "Thanks," he said, smiling. "I will, for a moment."

Veronica's heart bled for him. "Fancy being reduced to such ignominious expedients," she thought, "to get a few words with the girl who has promised to marry you." That Morwenna had pledged herself, or something like it, she had no doubt. How strange Morwenna was! Why were they so differently constituted? She could see herself climbing down a drainpipe in her nightdress, walking across broken glass on bare feet, swimming rivers and climbing walls to meet her lover—if she had one.

Chapter viii

IN the days preceding her departure with Giles —they had decided to spend their unofficial honeymoon at Ormea in the Ligurian Alps— Morwenna's iron self-control, on which she so greatly prided herself, was strained to breaking-point. Under her mask of impassivity, which did not invariably stay in position, her mind was seething with agitation and perplexity. Why had she let herself in for this mad adventure? How could she escape? She prided herself, had prided herself all her life, on keeping her word at whatever cost. It was the keystone of her personal code of honor, and it was not possible for her now to go back on her promise to Giles. She would have to go through with it. Somewhere, in the complexities of her nature, lurked a secret shame at her virginity, but this she would not acknowledge. What she did acknowledge to herself was that she was curious. Giles had told her that this experience would make all the difference to her. She would undergo a remarkable change, she would become, miraculously, liberated and fulfilled. It might be so. Other women-writers, her intimate friends, had lover after lover. She alone of her acquaintances of her own age had resisted this initiation. Why she was proposing to give to Giles Denham what she had refused to all his predecessors she

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could not have told. Certainly she would not admit to herself how keenly his devotion flattered her vanity. She liked him, she was sorry for him; but his obvious infatuation for herself was a constant source of satisfaction. How many women-novelists she knew would give their talents, their fame, their success—everything—to be able to arouse in a man the ardent passion which she had aroused! For Giles was not in love with her as a personage, as “Morwenna Crowley the well-known novelist and poet.” It was herself that he desired, it was her beauty—not her brains—which had conquered him. He admired her more than Veronica, who was young, fresh and adorably pretty. There had been nothing to prevent him from making love to Veronica, and she knew her sister well enough to know that he would have had every chance of an easy success. But no, it was she who had attracted him. She was thirty-two, although she did not admit to being over thirty, and when she examined herself in the glass in the morning, before she began to paint, she knew that if anything she looked more than her age. Nevertheless, so great was her charm, so compelling her loveliness that she had gained complete dominion over a man whom many women younger and more superficially attractive than herself would be proud to accept as a husband or a lover. She had him caught and bound, that was clear. But she had no hunger for his presence; she respected neither his character nor his intellect; she was too sure of him. His caresses sometimes thrilled her, and perhaps that night among the

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olive trees she had come as near to loving him as she had ever come to loving anybody . . . But it had lasted only a moment, and the moment might not recur. To live with him, to marry him, to let him be the father of her child, to sacrifice herself to him: could she do that? Did she want to do it? Surely not, unless, indeed, this mysterious physical passion, of which she had so often written but which she had never herself experienced, were to be awakened . . .

She was terribly frightened; and she was ashamed of her fright because she was not ignorant. Her theoretical knowledge of the central facts of life, based upon the best authorities, she held to be profound. After the granting of the suffrage she had gone in, for a time, for good works. As an official of a feminist organization, she had given instruction to numbers of working-class women on all the latest methods of contraception. She had only desisted from this activity when an outspoken charwoman had made certain unpardonable comments . . . Her good brains, her sound sense, her knowledge, did not save her from a tremulous fear of the unknown, a fear from which her equally tremulous curiosity could not be dissociated.

As to what might be going on in Denham's mind, Morwenna gave scarcely a thought. She knew about men. They were coarse and animal by nature, they were sensual and ravenous, without refinement, gross, carnal. For a refined woman like herself to submit to a man's embrace was to give him the greatest imaginable gift, for which

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nothing that he could do for her in return could ever be adequate. The significance of the fact that, in England at all events, the demand for lovers, for men upon any terms, enormously exceeded the supply, escaped her. Nor, for all her modernity, had she perceived the first beginnings of a new ideal in the relationship between the sexes. She was still sufficiently a Victorian to appropriate bodily self-respect exclusively to her own sex and to her own class. *She* might give herself, *she* might as a supreme act of sacrifice and condescension, grant her lover the favors that he craved. But that the lover, by giving her devotion, protection and physical fidelity, by keeping himself for her alone, might be presenting her with something of equal or of greater value in return, did not for a moment dawn upon her. There were many aspects of the "woman movement," to which so many years of her life had been devoted, of which she had but little real appreciation. It did not occur to her that freedom for women implied, in addition to certain modifications in the machinery of marriage such as the recognition of the practice of birth-control, the abolition of prostitution, the serious combating of venereal disease and the liberation of her sex from the purely masculine conception of morality which had been imposed upon it during the Christian era. Morwenna wanted things both ways. She wanted all the consideration and protection which her grandmother might have expected, together with all the advantages of modern "emancipation." She did not want to be

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man's equal, politically, and in every other department of life: she wanted to be his acknowledged superior. Had she been in Parliament she would have expected the utmost chivalry to be shown to her, a polite hush, close attention, and so forth. She would have been conscious of herself not as the member, say, for West Tooting, elected to represent her constituency, but as a charming, attractive and talented *woman* deigning to address an audience almost entirely composed of coarse and degraded *men*. . . .

And she had promised to go away with Giles, the day after to-morrow! Never a very good sleeper, during the past few nights she had hardly got any rest at all, and her nerves were getting more and more ragged. Veronica, who knew all her moods, guessed dimly what was the matter. "Whatever's up with you, Mops?" she asked, after an outburst of temper on Morwenna's part. "You seem to have come all over girlish during the last few days. Are you going to elope with Giles, or what?" Morwenna came nearer to blushing than she had done for many years.

On the day before Mrs. Crowley and Veronica started for Rapallo, Denham set off for Albenga, en route for Ormea, the little town in the Ligurian Alps which he and Morwenna had decided upon for their stay. He had casually mentioned his intention of going to Genoa to Nina and Bill Hepburn, and he flattered himself that he had put them off the scent. Morwenna, loathing the deception but at the same time getting a certain

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amount of romantic satisfaction out of it, had arranged a "Bunbury" with a friend at Bordighera, a Mrs. Watson Rathbone. Mrs. Rathbone, an elderly woman who wrote popular sentimental stories, had one ruling passion in life, which was to get her literary friends to indulge in illicit love-affairs. For years she had been trying to persuade Morwenna to set her cap at one distinguished novelist after another. She was the perfect Bunbury. Her reply had been rapturous; but Morwenna rather dreaded the "thirst for details" which she would display upon their next meeting. Giles and Morwenna had decided, in order to defeat the local gossips, to reach their objective by different routes. From Oneglia, a station on the way to Ventimiglia, there was a motor-omnibus service, direct to Ormea. From Albenga, which was in the direction of Genoa, there was a service over the Colle di San Bernardo to Garessio, a station on the little branch line between Ceva and Ormea.

Morwenna had been tender and affectionate on the day of Giles' departure, and in his relief he quickly forgot her previous coldness. It was with more hope than apprehension that he set off on his lonely journey to Ormea, to await her coming. The drive from Albenga in the shaky motor omnibus took him through mountain scenery so exquisite in its beauty that it was almost physical pain that Morwenna was not there to admire it with him. Slowly the 'bus climbed up the valley, higher and higher. At moments so sharp were the turns and so clumsy was the driver that the

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lumbering car came within a hair's-breadth of toppling down the hill-side. They passed village after village, and each one seemed more lovely than the last. Their narrow streets, with cool arcades on either side, were decorated with green branches for the feast of Corpus Christi. Groups of men and boys, in black clothes, stood about in the tiny piazzas. The girls and women formed separate groups of their own, and the two sexes seemed to be holding no intercourse with one another.

For the hundredth time Denham marveled at the abounding energy of the Italians, surely the most youthful of all the ancient races. Wherever the eye turned there were villages, and every hill which was not naked rock was terraced and cultivated to its summit. And how the villages swarmed with babies! Evidently the women were as fertile as the soil.

The air began to grow stronger, and there were no more olive trees. On the steep mountain slopes, that were covered with snow for four months of the year, the grass gleamed like green fire. The aspect of this high valley suggested England or Scotland rather than Italy. On one side of the road a brook splashed its way along a boulder-strewn bed; there were great groves of beech-trees and everywhere the yellow broom grew in profusion, together with a multiplicity of other flowers whose names Denham did not know. They reached at last the pass of San Bernardo, and the diligence, before beginning the descent to Garesio, waited long

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enough to allow him to stretch his legs, admire the tremendous Alpine panorama, and drink a whisky-and-soda at the big new hotel which stands at the head of the pass, at the mercy of the winds. It was a marvelous spot, but Denham did not think he would care to stay there, perched so perilously on the roof of the world. It was too near to Heaven to be cozy.

The car slid down the road, on the farther side of the pass, until it reached the series of villages which constitute Garessio and came to a halt outside the Municipio. It was a Thursday, and as he did not expect Morwenna until Saturday morning Denham decided to spend the night at Garessio. He found a room, in one of the small inns in the main street, which opened on to a terrace overlooking a delightful garden. Here after dinner he sat and smoked and dreamed about the future. He had come to life again! At last, he could feel himself alive, and full of energy and ambition. At last he had found an incentive to be up and doing! He turned over in his mind his financial prospects. They would have to begin rather modestly, but there would be enough for comfort. Morwenna would not have to make any sacrifices. Later on they would have a cottage in the country—as well as the little house in Westminster on which he had set his heart. Like so many prospective husbands, he gained a certain satisfaction from thinking what a much nicer married couple he and Morwenna would make than certain other married couples. They would be

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hospitable and informal: their friends would always be at ease in their house. Morwenna would very quickly overcome her present tendency to be a little "formidable," particularly if she became a mother . . . That Crucifixion for which Signor Drago wanted only fifteen hundred lire . . . He would have to get it, if he could find some means of transporting it to England. It was curiously like a Morales, though it seemed hardly possible that a Morales should find its way to a Ligurian village. But, whoever it was by, it was a marvelous piece of work. Now that he was actively engaged in castle-building, he began to think seriously of picture-buying. He had a *flair* for pictures and for furniture; and to make a setting for Morwenna that would be worthy of her charm and beauty would give him the utmost delight. He rejoiced in anticipation. . . .

The night was still and starlit, a night for love. If only Morwenna could have accompanied him . . . He longed for her with a longing that was an agony and the intensity of his passion for her blinded him to all the dangers which menaced his happiness.

That night Denham went to bed late, and slept little. He woke at five and dressed himself and went for a walk. The train did not go until nearly eleven, and it seemed as if the intervening hours would never pass. The little train, consisting only of two carriages, arrived at last and bore him slowly up the lovely valley to his destination.

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Arrived at Ormea, he felt slightly calmer, for he could say to himself, "She will be here to-morrow," and whenever he saw anything beautiful or picturesque he could say, "I must make a point of showing her this." The hotel he chose was called the Albergo Ligure. It was a long, low building, facing a garden full of fruit-trees, that was bounded by a mountain stream which made a continuous murmur. The bedrooms opened on to a broad terrace overlooking the garden. Denham engaged two rooms next door to one another. (Morwenna had objected to passing as his wife because it savored of intrigue.) The hotel was entirely empty, as indeed were the other hotels in the town, and there seemed no danger of making any embarrassing acquaintances. After the heat and the languors of San Bartolomeo the strong mountain air was bracing and invigorating. When he had finished luncheon, at a time which he usually devoted to the siesta, Denham set out for a walk, and followed the stream which passed the hotel up a beautiful valley, through a beech wood that reminded him of England. How Morwenna would delight in the flowers! "To-morrow afternoon," he thought, "we can lie in the grass under this beech tree, with the stream leaping at our feet." Every now and then he met a dun-colored cow, with large brown eyes, full of melancholy and benevolence. Each cow was accompanied by a peasant-girl who sat in the shadow of a black umbrella, knitting, until it was time to urge the beast home again along the rocky pathway to the

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village. There was a sparkle, a brightness in the air that was very different from the dusty, burning heat of the coast towns. The greenness of the valley, the greenness of the mountain slopes, the noisy stream, the sunlight glancing through the green leaves, the freshness and luxuriance of the foliage, the abundance of flowers, even the slowly munching cows, all combined to create an effect that was almost unearthly, paradisiacal, in its loveliness and calm.

There were more hours to be got through, interminable hours. "Surely," Denham reflected, "I ought to be too old now to get into such a dither of excitement!" Had he been as bad, in the far-off days, when he had courted Christabel? Surely not! This last love was the deepest love of his life, and the loves that had gone before were mere affections in comparison—strong affections, but never kindling to this white flame of passion. With a great effort of will he forced himself, on his return to the hotel, to concentrate his attention on a novel. Luckily it was a detective story and a good one. In looking back on this experience Denham always recalled the author's name with a feeling of intense personal gratitude. The story was long and absorbing and held his attention until midnight. The strong air had made him sleepier than usual, and when he had at last discovered how and by whom the crime had been committed he switched off his light and was soon unconscious.

The motor diligence from Oneglia was due to arrive before the tall, ruinous-looking Palazzo

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Municipale at half-past eleven in the morning. To kill time Denham walked up and down the narrow main street of the town and made a few casual purchases from the shops. For Morwenna's room he bought a mass of flowers which he arranged himself. He also bought half a bottle of Strega, which Morwenna liked best of the Italian liqueurs, and some illustrated papers. The minutes were leaden-footed. He found it impossible to read, impossible to settle down. What would he not have given, just then, for the society of Bill and Nina! It was 11.30 by the big clock under the roof of the Municipio but there was no sign of the diligence. Twelve struck, and still it had not arrived. At last, far away, along the white highroad, there appeared a cloud of dust. The lumbering car emerged into view and came, with a roar and rattle, to a full stop in the untidy square at the outskirts of the town. The driver jumped off his seat, and the peasants began to climb down with their clumsy hampers and bundles amid a great deal of chatter and gesticulation. Denham, in an ecstasy of apprehension, could see no trace of Morwenna. No: she had not arrived. Pale and shaken, he inquired of the ticket-collector if he had not seen an English lady at Oneglia station. But the ticket-collector had seen nobody. . . .

Black clouds had collected over the mountains, and the atmosphere had a suffocating heaviness. A few large, warm drops heralded the approaching downpour. Denham, in an agony of disappointment, went back to the hotel. During luncheon

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the rain began to descend in torrents. He turned over in his head what he could do. If only he could take some kind of action, things would be better. Should he telegraph? Impossible. The message, however worded, would be all over San Bartolomeo in five minutes. Denham had had ample experience of the insufferable curiosity of the Italians and he was too considerate to subject Morwenna to the trouble of lying to her servant, or to the keeper of the *piccola bottega*. No: there was nothing to be done save wait until to-morrow, and if she did not come then, to go in search of her. He explained as carelessly as he could, to the odiously sympathetic proprietor of the hotel, that his "cousin," the signorina inglese, had probably been delayed. The rain persisted all day and kept Denham a prisoner in the hotel, in which there was neither book nor newspaper. During that time he went through all the agonies of solitary confinement, combined with all the heartsickness of hope deferred. On the following day the diligence was again half-an-hour late, and again Morwenna was not in it. Denham, now almost at the end of his tether, went in search of a car. He could not afford it, but he felt that further inactivity—another twenty-four hours in the *Albergo Ligure*—would drive him mad. There was only one car available in the town and the chauffeur was unwilling, at first, to go as far as San Bartolomeo, but, by agreeing to an excessive price Denham managed to over-persuade him. He had nothing to complain of in regard to the speed at which he was driven.

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The car was a powerful Fiat, and the chauffeur's idea seemed to be to get a tiresome job over as quickly as possible. They raced up the valley and after negotiating the pass took the great loops of the descending road at breakneck speed. In his present mood of utter dejection Denham would not very much have cared if the car had swerved the few inches which would have sent him to destruction. The pace at which they were going acted, in a way, as a sedative to his nerves. . . .

Arrived before the Villa Aurelia, which he never thought to see again so soon and in such circumstances, he jumped out of the car and walked up to the front door. He knocked and rang, but could obtain no answer. Was the place shut up? Had Morwenna started to meet him and got lost? Again he knocked and rang, and at last heard footsteps. The door was opened and Morwenna stood before him. Her face was yellow under her paint, and her eyes looked strained and tired. With an effort of self-control which he could not help admiring, she began to take the situation in hand. "Oh, my dear," she cried, smiling at him brightly, "what *have* you come back for? I was going to start to-morrow. . . . I would have wired to you but you see I didn't know the name of the hotel. I had one or two things I *had* to see to before I could get away. I am so sorry. Were you very lonely?"

He was too exhausted to reply, and too confused in his mind. He knew she was lying, knew that—judged by any standpoint—she had treated him

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with great cruelty. It was due to her lack of imagination, which sprang, in turn, from the fact that she did not love him. But she was frightened, poor dear. That was at the root of it all. Denham knew that he was in for a difficult ordeal. If only he himself had not been in such a state of nerves! Most of the good which the past two years of wandering had done him was now undone, and he felt in much the same condition that he was in at the time of his breakdown. Even Morwenna could not help noticing that he looked gray and haggard.

"I'm thankful nothing has happened to you, my dear," he said at last. "I imagined all kinds of awful things. . . . I hired a car in Ormea to bring me here, and if you are packed it may as well take us back. It will be much pleasanter than going by diligence."

A trapped look came into Morwenna's face, which made Denham groan internally. "One would suppose I wanted to murder the girl," he thought, bitterly, "instead of making a home for her and her children, and loving and caring for her until the end of my life."

"I didn't really want to start before to-morrow," Morwenna said, nervously.

"But surely a few hours won't make much difference. Is there anything so urgently important that keeps you here?" In her agitation Morwenna could not think of a lie and remained dumb.

"Come, my dearest," said Denham, kissing her tenderly, "you surely won't have the heart to

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condemn me to another night of solitary imprisonment? I've had an awful time during the past two days, I can tell you. Do go and put your hat on and get your things ready—there's a good girl. And if you've got a drink in the house, the chauffeur would like one, and so would I."

"I'm afraid there isn't anything," said Morwenna. "I'm awfully sorry." (Obviously it was not worth while wasting any of the good French brandy which her mother kept for medicinal purposes. . . . French brandy was so expensive in Italy. If he wanted a drink, he could stop at the Caffè in Oneglia.)

"Well, go and pack, my darling," said Denham rather drearily, "and give me a kiss before you go." The embrace was a wintry one, and did not dissipate Denham's depression. He sat alone in the ugly sitting-room and smoked cigarette after cigarette until Morwenna at last appeared with her suitcase in her hand. Poor dear! A flood of tenderness for her overcame him at the sight of her. She must have had a thin time during the past two days! What agonies of doubt and vacillation she must have endured! At this moment, she looked older than he did. Never before had he seen her revealed so clearly as a middle-aged spinster, a spinster of "settled habits." But he believed, with something like a religious faith, that her physical fulfillment would give her back a youthfulness of heart, increase her happiness and understanding and soften her asperities. The task which lay ahead of him was one which no man

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would undertake who did not truly love; and he relied upon his sure and deep-set liking, his boundless will to please, to see them both safely through their difficulties.

"Come along, Morwenna," he said, taking her suitcase. "We shall be there in less than three hours." Without a word she locked up the house and walked in front of him to where the car awaited them.

Chapter ix

FROM time to time during their journey into the mountains Denham cast an anxious glance at his companion. The feeling of constraint which afflicted them both would not wear off, and such conversation as took place between them was forced and unnatural. The weather had been gray and cloudy during the early part of the day, but now the sun flamed down upon the climbing road, the terraced vines, and mountain slopes, irradiating the whole landscape. They ought to have been unspeakably happy, and each was uncomfortably aware of it. But the intangible barrier between them seemed only to increase as they neared their destination. Denham was tired out, tongue-tied and wretched, and Morwenna, ghastly under her paint, affected a cheerfulness which only emphasized her nervous tension.

They arrived at the Albergo Ligure at about seven in the evening, and Morwenna went at once to her room to get ready for dinner. How pretty the place was! While Denham was waiting for Morwenna to appear he strolled about the garden, smoking a cigarette. The brook which ran in a half-circle round the grounds of the inn, made a ceaseless murmuring as it bubbled along its rocky bed. There were rose-bushes and acacias and fig-

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trees—even apple-trees—in the garden; and plenty of deck-chairs. Everything was so pleasant! Two new guests had arrived during the afternoon—a young Frenchman and his mistress. Denham watched them as they sat laughing and talking together, under the shade of an acacia. The man had a dark-brown beard and wore eye-glasses, behind which twinkled a pair of kindly brown eyes; the girl was pale and dark, a typical Southerner, but too elegant to be an Italian. There was a kind of feline grace about her, the grace of a creature accustomed to charm and accustomed to be petted. How easy, jolly and practical they were, these two! Yet, in a way, Denham did not envy them. Their joys were a shade too easy, too prosaic.

When Morwenna appeared for dinner, Denham, quick to read her moods, saw at once that he was in for a social occasion. He himself had very little façade, and such drawing-room arts as he had managed to acquire in London had slipped from him entirely during his wandering life in Italy. Surely, he thought, Morwenna might unbend, for these few days. But Morwenna was hiding from him; hiding behind her perfect manner. *Vitas hinnuleo me similis Chloe!* From the depths of his memory the Horatian tag drifted up into his thoughts, as he watched her.

They dined in the open, on the stone-paved terrace outside the hotel. The noise of the brook which ran past the delicious garden made a murmurous accompaniment to their conversation. Certainly, on her own lines, Morwenna was wonder-

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ful. She had put on one of her most becoming dresses, a dress of grass-green silk, which seemed to identify her with the greenness all around them, and with the fiery greenness of the mountain slopes. Her dark hair had recently been waved and its appearance betrayed an artist's handiwork. When she looked across the table at him, her mouth slightly parted in a delicate and artificial smile which showed a glimpse of her even white teeth, Denham was æsthetically stirred as he would have been by some beautiful picture.

Morwenna guided the conversation adroitly on to subjects about which they were accustomed to disagree in a manner which interested them both. She struck all the notes she knew which were calculated to make him talk. She wanted him to get carried away, to become forgetful of himself and of herself. For a time she succeeded, for her art was subtle and she knew Denham's mind far better than she understood his nature. They wrangled pleasantly over politics and had their usual argument over Walt Whitman, a poet for whom Morwenna had an active, rather supercilious dislike and Denham a profound love and admiration. Morwenna's confident persiflage about Walt, her easy jeering way of taking him down and "ticking him off," jarred on him. It wasn't his idea of a sense of humor. There was too much of a sneer—oh, very prettily concealed and covered over, but still a sneer—about Morwenna's gay contempts. For D. H. Lawrence's weaker moments she had an eye like a hawk. Her mockery was well-sustained;

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very effective. But were not her comments really as shallow as those of the bright young things who pranced into print about Lawrence's books in some of the weekly reviews? Denham found his own simplicity and his "earnestness," of which he had always been more than a little ashamed, thrown by Morwenna into the most ludicrous light. His vanity made him wish that she could regard it as "intellectual sincerity." Hang it all, he *was* intellectually sincere! So, of course, was she, in her own way. But she needn't be so flippant about things which he took so seriously. "Shaw spotted your Anglo-Saxon 'sense of humor' forty years ago," he remarked. "*He* wasn't going to have the heart and soul of his work pecked at by intellectuals with shallow minds and a fixed grin. So he clothed them with a humor which beat the humorists at their own game. He knew how to protect his sacred verities against the supercilious English 'educated' classes. He has the last laugh. That's why they hate him. His wisdom has defeated the glitter of their showy cleverness. D. H. Lawrence of course, and even Walt, stand naked and unarmed before your sense-of-humorists."

"Oh, you sentimentalists!" Morwenna retorted. "I am sure the cheapest sob-stuff that ever was seen in a theater would move you to tears."

"I don't quite see what that has to do with it," Denham observed, feeling, nevertheless, that it possibly had rather a lot. "But I confess I weep

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passionately in theaters; I cry over books in which the heroine dies in tragic circumstances; even 'movies' have been known to give me a lump in the throat."

Their laughter at one another broke the ice a little, and relieved the nervous tension which had held them apart.

When dinner was over and they had finished drinking their coffee, they went for a walk along the road leading towards the pass—the highroad to Oneglia. All round them rose the dark, shadowy shapes of the mountains. The woods, clinging to their slopes, were black and mysterious. The sky was overcast and few stars were visible and no moon. It was an uncomfortable, disturbing night, and the walk destroyed the mood of cheerful friendliness which their conversation at dinner had induced in them. Denham had an agonizing vision of the peace and security that might come to Morwenna and himself—if only they could find a shelter from this nocturnal melancholy in their love. Could they but lie breast to breast, clasped and responsive, the gales might shake these terrifying mountains to their foundations without disturbing the impregnable citadel of their mutual trust and mutual fulfillment.

Morwenna shivered, and pulled her light silk shawl across her throat. "Let's go back," she said. "It's cold and I'm deadly tired."

At her bedroom door she put up her lips to be kissed, and without complaint he accepted his dismissal.

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In the days which followed, Denham found himself like one who, having slipped from very nearly the top rung of the emotional ladder to the bottom of it, has to begin the climb afresh. It was a nerve-racking business: and somehow, though he was too naïf to see exactly how, it was all wrong. What should have been the most sacred moment of their joint lives, when it came to them, left Giles bewildered, shaken to the depths of his being, deprived alike of confidence and of hope. Shocked, in a way insulted, and wholly despairing, Denham lay awake in his room, night after night, thinking, with quickened sympathy, less of his own distresses than of Morwenna's anguish, which he could neither assuage nor share. When he had looked for tenderness, when he had been prepared with all the emotional capacity which he still possessed, to pour out his gratitude in return for a gift, he had found that there was, in reality, no gift. There was only a promise of stoic endurance, based on self-love and touched to no unselfish issues. Had he come to her on equal terms he could have taken his pleasure of her with the same detachment as she took her pain from him. She had taken her pain from him because her code of honor—which, though individual and peculiar had yet a very real influence upon her conduct—insisted that she ought to try to go through with the experience to which she was committed. Her sense of duty forced her to the brink of the irrevocable and left her there. And behind what she conceived to be her duty, were the primary instincts which prompted her to

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let matters take their natural course—her curiosity, her desire to develop her own personality, her weariness of constant negation, and the faint, vague stirring of her thwarted appetite. These things urged her onwards, but only the inspiration of love could give them the power to overcome her inhibitions; and that inspiration she had not got. Of Denham, as a personality affecting her life, she thought no more than the Queen bee may be presumed to think of the drone. Her high-strung determination, her heroic endurance, which would have qualified her for a martyr's crown, did not qualify her for the sacrament of which, with unconscious unworthiness, she tried in vain to force herself to partake. The emotions which she aroused in her lover she neither shared nor understood. She derived no happiness from her partial surrenders—not even the happiness of granting a favor to a beloved person—and for that reason she gave none.

No sooner had Morwenna committed herself with Denham, although only to the extent of coming away with him alone, than all the social and religious precepts which had been instilled in her in youth came back into her brain and haunted her. Her self-love was tortured. Something had happened to the picture of herself which she had always kept before her eyes. It didn't look a bit the same. Instead of the grave Madonna-like features and the glance which radiated wisdom and chastity, that she was accustomed to contemplate with much self-satisfaction, she saw only the

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distraught features of a woman who had made a fool of herself. She had accepted a love which she could not return, out of vanity and curiosity, and she saw no way of extricating herself, with dignity, from the situation in which her own insincerity had landed her. She could not blame Denham. Much as she would have liked to do so, the masculine quality of her intellect would not allow it. He had, from his first declaration of love, wanted to marry her as soon as she would consent to it. He had no strong "views" about the wickedness of modern marriage, like the views she herself had constantly expressed in her books. On those points he largely took his cue from her. She, of course, was emancipated, broad-minded, one who believed in the absolute right of adult women to do precisely what they pleased with their own bodies . . . And all the rest of it! No, she couldn't blame Denham for getting her into this mess. Besides, the man loved her. He was pitiably in love. Night after night, after Denham had left her, she lay awake, with wide-open eyes, trying to solve the riddle of her own complex nature; trying, in vain, to reconcile her instincts with her theories. Occasionally, but rarely, she thought with some remorse of Denham.

When they met in the daytime Morwenna held her head very high indeed. She was a gallant woman, and Denham had no conception of the internal struggle which went on continuously behind her mask of suave superiority. He tried hard to be at ease with her, as much at ease in the

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tranquil moments as he was during the emotional ones, but he never succeeded. There was some intangible barrier between them which, try as he would, he could not break down. When he talked to her about the future, about where they should live and when they should be married, she made only vague and indefinite answers. Even now that they were mutually pledged to one another, Morwenna still insisted that the door should be neither open nor shut, as tenaciously as she insisted upon preserving her demi-virginity.

Denham's feeling of insecurity kept him an attentive lover but made him a very miserable man. Often he found himself longing for the society of Bill and Nina and Veronica. He had very few books with him and no paints or drawing materials, and as Morwenna shut herself up for hours at a stretch in order to work, he found that time hung heavy on his hands and was reduced to morbid brooding. The peace of mind which he had enjoyed for two really very happy years had left him abruptly. Sometimes he felt enormously tired—so tired that it seemed that his capacity either to love or to hate had, in truth, worn itself out. He saw himself as a middle-aged man dreaming the dreams of youth. Hadn't he better adjust himself to the changed conditions? Hadn't he better fall back upon himself and cultivate a philosophic indifference to all and sundry? Oh, not an outward indifference—certainly not—but an inner indifference? Could he not lend himself to others, when he pleased, but never give? But no,

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perhaps it was better to suffer than to become dead. A stanza of one of Gautier's lyrics came into his head one day, during one of his lonely strolls by the swift-rushing Tanaro.

*Moi, je n'aime plus rien,
Ni l'homme, ni la femme,
Ni mon corps, ni mon âme,
Pas même mon vieux chien.
Allez dire qu'on creuse,
Sous le pâle gazon,
Une fosse sans nom.
Hélas! j'ai dans le cœur une tristesse affreuse!*

Quite right, that. When one ceases to be able to love, he reflected, one might as well turn up one's toes.

The ten days, so crowded with emotional experiences both for Denham and Morwenna, came to an end at last. Both of them felt that they could not have endured the strain of their imperfect union much longer. Their last day together was, however, a singularly happy one. For Denham it was one of the most blissfully happy days that he could remember having spent in all his life. Probably it was the thought of her imminent return to the Villa Aurelia and to the ordered and regular life to which she was accustomed, which removed from Morwenna her load of care. Removed it was, and for one day at least Denham experienced to the full that happiness in the company of his beloved for which he longed.

The day was perfect, and, walking in a new

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direction, they discovered a lovely and secret valley down which a little stream boiled and bubbled in its haste to join the river. On either side of it were green meadows. The slopes of the hills were thickly wooded and the bridle-track led them through groves of beeches, chestnuts and feathery acacias. Denham's heart sang in his breast. It was as though they had both recovered, if only for a few fleeting hours, their lost youth. Morwenna was entranced by the beauty of the valley. They found a sheltered spot by the stream in which to sit, and Morwenna took her shoes and stockings off, and dabbled her feet in the chill, clear water. She did not look a day more than twenty-five. They were as happy as any two lovers could well be, as happy as the simpler-minded couples who lie clasped and unashamed in London's parks and open spaces. They lay contented in their grassy nest, with the stream at their feet, and the mountains on every side to shut them in, alone in their paradise. Morwenna lay tranquilly, with her head on Denham's breast and his arm around her. For the time she was able to prevent herself from thinking and to enjoy the comforting sensation of pressing her cheek against her lover's rough tweed coat and feeling his body near to hers.

They did not return to the hotel until the sun was nearly setting, and were in consequence very late for dinner. Their dinner, all the same, was the jolliest meal they had ever had together. After it, they went and sat outside the dismal little

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caffè, which is the best that Ormea can boast, and drank between them a bottle of white wine.

Once again, at her bedroom door, Morwenna put up her lips to be kissed, and Denham accepted her gesture as a sign of dismissal, and went to his room. What a wonderful day it had been! A really happy day. Would they be able to go on like that, or would it all be different to-morrow? That was the question which troubled him. He knew only too well the variability of Morwenna's moods. She was perfectly capable of treating him, on the following day, with the distant politeness with which she treated her most casual acquaintances. The night was warm, but luckily there were no mosquitoes. Denham stepped through his open window on to the balcony, which ran the length of the hotel, and looked out over the shadowy garden, listening to the murmur of the stream. In the light of the moon the mountain peaks looked mysterious and unearthly, black and silver, the home of trolls and witches.

He threw away the stump of his cigarette and got into bed. He did not feel in the least sleepy, but he closed his eyes and tried to compose himself for sleep. The memory of the day's happiness made him feel unusually contented. Suddenly he heard a light footstep on the balcony, and sat up, alert and wakeful. A figure in a white silk wrapper stood in the window. "Morwenna darling," he whispered. In she came slowly towards him, and in the dim half-light he could see that she was smiling. So the mood of happiness had lasted!

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Her fears, perplexities, angers and inhibitions—the nightmare brood which had caused them both such intolerable misery—had not yet resumed their mastery of her mind. For a time she was unhaunted, and the ghosts were laid.

Chapter x

MORWENNA slept late and only just got dressed in time to catch the motor diligence for Oneglia. Denham saw her off. A kiss, a wave of the hand, an enigmatic smile into which he could read whatever meaning he pleased, and she was gone. He stared for a moment or two, in a bewildered sort of way, at the quickly disappearing car. Then he went back to the hotel, packed his bag, paid the bill, and caught the train to Ceva. Well, the brief and platonic honeymoon, so eagerly anticipated, was over now, and what, he asked himself, had really happened? Where *were* they? He had to own that he was more completely in the dark than he had ever been since the beginning of his association with Morwenna. But at all events they had achieved one happy day; and nothing could ever rob them of the memory of it. That at least was something gained, after all their ardors and endurances!

Denham still felt an afterglow of this happiness; and he felt tranquil, agreeably in command of himself and pleasantly detached. How pretty the Tanaro valley looked, as the tiny train thoughtfully pursued its way to Ceva! The sun shone brightly, and the rich grass on the hillsides had the strange fiery look which he had so often

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noticed. At Bagnasco he saw a dark-eyed peasant girl, her hair concealed by a white handkerchief, driving a dun-colored cow in front of her along the road, and his eye noted with delight the indolent grace of her body, the suppleness of all her movements. He felt for a moment like an undergraduate on a holiday, eager for adventure, ready to kiss the first pretty wench who would let him. Mixed with his love for Morwenna, though he did not realize it and would hotly have denied the suggestion had it been expressed in words, there was a strain of something closely resembling hatred. Or perhaps it was only her "unnaturalness" that he hated, her synthetic refinement, that smelled just a teeny bit of chemicals. The girl caught his eye, just as the little train drew up at the station, and gave him a slow, indulgent smile. Denham felt as if he had been given a beautiful flower. Few things are more touching than the momentary greeting, charged a little with tenderness, of men and women who pass one another on life's road and exchange unspoken good wishes.

At Ceva Denham changed and caught a train for Savona, a town which he had often passed through but never explored. He had thought, originally, of going to Genoa for two or three days, but he changed his mind and lay that night at Savona, proceeding the next day to Noli, and the day after to Finalmarina. He reached San Bartolomeo on the fourth day after his departure from Ormea.

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On his way up from the station he met Veronica, who seemed exuberantly glad to see him. She was carrying a basket full of figs and insisted on his eating one. "Lots of news, Giles," she said. "There are some new people whom Nina simply *adorés*. Three men, who are always half drunk, and the wife of one of them who is usually drunk, too. Mother, of course, nearly had a fit when she was told about them. And the pretty widow with her mamma, and the Oxford undergraduates with the gray suède shoes and the Oxford bags who were supposed to be so wicked, have all cleared off to Tyrol. I think they couldn't stand Nina's drunks. Isn't this place ridiculous? Did you ever see anything so suburban! There are about sixteen English people here, and four mutually exclusive cliques, all hating each other like sin. We've got relatives coming next week. My married sister and her husband, and a friend of his who seems to be completely mad. His name's Burnham, and he's a bart., and he addresses meetings. He's tremendously 'ethical.' You know the sort of thing? He writes Morwenna 'cosmic' letters, all about planes of consciousness and the mission of the older races, and the development of the human soul, and all that." Veronica paused a moment for breath. "I think he's completely cracked," she went on, "from the way he writes. I only hope Mother will stand him."

"Mother will stand him all right," Denham reflected, cynically. "Has anything else exciting been happening?" he asked. "How are Bill and

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Nina?" "They don't seem awfully cheerful," said Veronica. "I think they've been having rows and they're making it up again. Mops has been to stay with a rival woman-novelist at Bordighera. A Mrs. Something-Something, who writes 'strong' novels—you know, all about sturdy Cornish lasses with deep bosoms, and fists that could fell an ox, who have illegitimate babies by handsome artists from London and then commit suicide on the last page but one. Not that I've read any of them all through. I always stop when I get to the deep bosoms. I *hate* all that beefy farmer's daughter business. Why can't people write novels about . . ."

"About what?" Denham asked. "Oh, I don't know," said Veronica in some perplexity. "Just the things that nobody talks about and nobody writes about, the really interesting things. Oh, I don't mean *sex*. All novelists mess about with sex. Of course they have to, if they are trying to give any sort of a reflection of life. But why can't they write about *ordinary* people, as we know they are?"

They were walking between the double row of jaded palm trees on the Corsa Garibaldi, and Denham was feeling tired and rather cross, but Veronica's volubility would not be stilled. "I don't suppose anybody *dare* write about people as they are," Denham suggested. "James Joyce, perhaps—but then his people aren't ordinary."

"Mops has got a Ulysses!" said Veronica, "which she reads propped up on the chimney-

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piece as if it were the Family Bible. She does it for the good of her art, and she won't let me come near it."

"Quite right," said Denham.

"Why?" Veronica retorted, tartly. "Girls of my age aren't necessarily complete fools. In some ways I probably know a good deal more than Mops. Nobody ever conceals anything, among my generation. Mops would have a fit if she knew what the people I meet of my own age talk about. But we aren't improper. We just want to know what we are up against, so that we can see what to do about it. As a matter of fact, I *have* read the last fifty pages of 'Ulysses,' because a boy I know at Magdalen lent it to me. It was pretty awful, but it was probably a great deal more like what even thoroughly respectable married women are like, at the bottom of their hearts, than Mops' impossibly refined characters are. I was sick after I read it, Giles. I honest-to-God catted. But I don't think I'm worse off now for having taken that black draught. At least I don't live in any make-believe world."

"Unlucky you, my dear," said Giles. "Unlucky you! The make-believe world is much the most bearable one to live in, for it is the world of the imagination."

They had reached by this time the Villa Rosa and Giles prepared to say good-by to Veronica. But Veronica wanted to go on talking. "Let me come up into your room, Giles," she said. "I don't want to go home. It won't shock me to see

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you wash your hands, and I'll unpack for you and put your things away neatly. Besides, I'd like a drink."

"This isn't Paris, my dear," said Giles. "I think you'd better wait for me downstairs, and then we'll go along to the Caffè Roma."

"Oh, Giles!" murmured Veronica reprovingly, "are *you* going to look after my reputation, too?"

Giles left Veronica devouring figs in the garden of the Villa Rosa while he went to his room and exchanged his traveling clothes for a white tennis shirt open at the neck and a pair of flannel trousers. If he could have consulted his own wishes, he would never have worn "respectable" clothes at all. He had taken his least shabby suits to Ormea purely on Morwenna's account. He felt that she liked men to look tidy. Veronica, on the other hand, preferred him in peasant's clothes and was always urging him to shock the English colony at San Bartolomeo by going barefoot.

Veronica looked adorably pretty when Giles rejoined her. She was lying back in a deck-chair, with her hat off, and she had an amused smile upon her face. Long-legged, graceful, slim, but with almost a womanly contour of the breast, she looked the very incarnation of youth and perfect health. She had a delicious wholesomeness; and the sweetness of disposition that went with it was apparent in every expression of her face. Giles thought she had the frankest eyes of any one he had ever known. She jumped up at his approach and slipped her arm through his. "Come on," she cried. "The

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clock's struck gin, and I know you are dying to see Bill and Nina and the drunks." They hurried off to the Caffè Roma, where one of the first sights that met Denham's eyes was Nina's unruly mop of brown hair. She was sitting at a table under the arcade, with two middle-aged men, a younger man and a handsome blonde woman who was rather elegantly dressed. Denham's long experience of the Mediterranean enabled him to sum them up at a glance. "Two retired Anglo-Indians," he thought, "drinking themselves comfortably to death on their pensions; and a couple of déclassés taking refuge from their creditors."

Nina hailed him with delight and promptly introduced him to her friends. Veronica had met them already. Their names were Mr. Buck-Harris and Commander Hillier, and Mr. Piers and Lady Susan Kernahan. Hillier, Buck-Harris and the Kernahans watched Denham with keen interest as he began to sip his cocktail. They wanted to know whether he was, as they were, definitely enrolled among the personal adherents of Bacchus or whether he was merely a trifle who intended to offer himself as a victim on some less worthy shrine. (That wretched creature, Aphrodite, for example, was always luring away perfectly good men to an ignoble form of self-destruction!) The results of their investigations were disappointing to them. Denham drank obviously because he liked it, and not because he must.

Denham, on his side, investigated no less thoroughly the drunks. His experience of drunks

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was profound. Over and over again he had watched their arduous days, their slow rebuilding of themselves, their progression from gray and tremulous awakenings to rosy nocturnal culminations. He saw that both Buck-Harris and Hillier were admirable of their kind. They had the fruitiness of a fruity but mature and mellow port. Their voices were low, seductive and melodious. The habit of turning a sentence, acquired in youth, remained with them still in their alcoholic twilight. Their libations, he guessed, would liberate nothing that was discourteous, unworthy or obscene. They would not be boastful in their cups, or indiscreet: they would glow, gently. Of the Kernahans he formed a less pleasant impression. They belonged to the type of person who never has done anything, never will do anything, and is not even sufficiently well-educated to know how to be idle gracefully. In imagination, he could see Lady Susan exploiting her social advantages in order to bounce tradesmen into giving her credit, driving about London in a taxi until she found somebody whom she could prevail upon to lend her some money and take her out to dinner, and ending up in a pseudo-Bohemian restaurant, more expensive than the Carlton, which people of her type have made their own. Probably this couple had first retired on France, and then found the more fashionable *plages* too hot to hold them. Denham had a robust and healthy antipathy to professional "tiddlers." Of two evils, on the whole he preferred the one represented by Ma Crowley.

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Mr. Buck-Harris, who was almost bald and had a chubby face and little pursed-up lips like those of a small boy, was discussing modern poetry with Nina. He was all for polish and a classical economy. His favorite modern poets were the Robert Bridges of the "Shorter Poems" and A. E. Housman, and, among French writers, José-Maria de Hérédia. Of some of James Elroy Flecker's poetry he also approved. Nina developed unsuspected Celtic tendencies and began to talk rather fluently about W. B. Yeats and A.E. Lady Susan, with an easy confidence, produced—as she would produce her lipstick from her little bag—the Sitwells, Iris Tree, Miss Cunard and even T. S. Eliot. Denham thought only of Morwenna, but did not dare to bring her name into the argument. Veronica and Piers Kernahan drank their cocktails in silence, with leisurely appreciation. Commander Hillier listened with the most touching respect and admiration to every word which fell from his friend Mr. Buck-Harris' cherubic lips.

Denham, who was no good at literary small-talk, looked about for the strangely absent Bill. As soon as he had an opportunity of doing so, he asked Nina what had become of him. Nina was elaborately, suspiciously off-hand. "Oh, he's knocking about somewhere, I expect."

Something was "in the air" and Denham did not like it. He did not like Nina's new companions, either, nor her too obvious eagerness to please them. Somehow, she was not the same Nina that he had left a fortnight before. She seemed

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on the defensive. It occurred to him that she might be making friends with these people in order to put Bill in his place, to show him how easily she could do without him. Woman's genius for giving her adorers a salutary dose of "hell" was well-known to Denham and he did not suppose that Nina was any different, in this respect, from Morwenna. When an opportunity presented itself, he made an excuse to leave the party, and Veronica followed him. "Let's go and look for Bill," Denham suggested. "Where is he likely to be?"

"Bar Ligure," Veronica replied, without hesitation. They turned down by the side of the church, and traversed a narrow and unsavory street, till they came to the bar. The contrast between the blinding glare outside and the coolness and darkness of the wine-shop made it difficult for them to see clearly, and it was Bill's subdued "Hullo" which first revealed his presence. He was sitting in a far corner of the bar, with a tumbler full of brandy-and-soda and a half-empty packet of Macedonia cigarettes on the table in front of him. He looked ghastly. "As we didn't see you at the Caffè Roma, we came in search of you here," said Veronica.

"I can't stand Nina's new pick-ups," Bill replied. "I don't mind the old sozzlers so much, but the other couple make me sick. I'm going home in a few days. I don't know what's the matter with this place, but there's a sort of blight on it."

"I know," said Veronica.

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"Yes. I think you do. Bless you. Why don't you escape from it?"

"How can I? Where can I go? There's Mother to think of, too."

"No, there isn't, is there, Giles? All this sacrificing of children to parents is as wrong as it could be. Your life is more important than your mother's. Besides, she has Morwenna and the other one who is married, to fall back on. Come to London with me. Take a furnished room somewhere, and trust me to find you a job."

"Bill, it's too sweet of you. But I haven't any money. I haven't a penny except what Mother gives me. I've nothing of my own at all. Of course, I daresay Mops would let me have a little, if I asked her. But I think she's rather hard up, herself."

"I think Bill is giving you sound advice, Veronica," Giles interposed. "You are too good for this sort of existence. The place *has* got a blight on it. Or rather, the English people in it have a blight on *them*. Treat Bill and me as friends whom you can trust. Adopt us as uncles, in fact. We'll see you through, if ever you want to make a dash for it. I shall probably go back to London myself, in a few weeks, and start work again."

Veronica looked at Giles in some bewilderment. "You've changed, haven't you?"

"Yes. I've changed."

"Why?"

"It's hard to explain," said Giles. "But if you

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come back to life, you come back to suffering, and to hope also. And that means work. I've had two years of a *dolce far niente* existence. Now I am being caught back again into the machine."

"Giles dear, I do hope you succeed in taking Mops along with you, and hitching her on to your particular spoke."

Giles laughed, and ordered another round of drinks. "Here's to the future," he said, lifting his glass of vermouth. "I've got a kind of feeling that things are going to happen to all of us before we are much older."

"So have I," said Bill, grimly.

Chapter xi

NINA sent a message to the Villa Teresa to say that she was dining out, so that Bill and Miss Wigsworth, when the children had been put to bed, found themselves alone together for the evening meal. Bill had scarcely noticed Miss Wigsworth before, because Nina had taken excellent care that he should never have an opportunity of doing so. He had been given to understand that she was foolish and domesticated, that she was the daughter of a Bank manager at Putney who had been ejected from his job for some financial indiscretion, and that she had a "rave" on her benefactor. It was one of Nina's weaknesses to advertise the devotion of her friends, a weakness which sprang from personal vanity allied to some queer, inner lack of confidence. She was always telling Bill how much other people loved her, how Ernesto the cab-driver would "do *anything* for her"; how Miss Wigsworth had tearfully declared that she would die for her employer if need be. Soon she would be boasting of her conquest of the dreadful Kernahans and telling him how Mr. Buck-Harris had invited her to elope with him and Commander Hillier had prayed her to accompany him on a voyage to South America in a fishing smack. Ah, Nina, Nina!

Miss Wigsworth, fair-haired, trim and as clean-

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looking as a hospital nurse, helped him to *zucchini*—tiny vegetable-marrows fried in butter—and observed that the day had been exceptionally hot. How sensible she seemed, and self-controlled and safe! Bill wondered what she “thought about life,” and whether the sons-in-law of Bank managers get preferential treatment in the matter of overdrafts. He wondered, as he looked into her candid eyes and answered her small talk, whether she had a “boy” at home in Putney. If he could have seen into her heart and read its secrets he would have been startled out of his wits; but mercifully for Miss Wigsworth, the ardors of hatred and of love—of hatred for Nina and of love for himself—which consumed her being, did not reveal themselves to Bill’s casual and preoccupied regard. Bill was not skilled in the ways of women, and experience had not yet taught him that whenever a woman makes her man suffer she immediately inspires in her rivals a passionate longing to comfort him. Miss Wigsworth was lacerated by the anguish in Bill’s eyes, and had she been able to awaken his desire she would have given herself completely, without reserve or hesitation.

“I suppose Nina will bring her party back to the house to play poker,” she remarked demurely. “Do you think I ought to go to the *piccola bottega* and get another bottle of Sarti? There’s hardly any left.”

“It’s such filthy muck,” said Bill. “Isn’t there anything else we can get? Even Strega is a more

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palatable rot-gut. There's no whisky to be had, I suppose?"

"Only the 'Black-and-White Horse' variety that made Nina so ill."

"Well, I suppose we must stop short of murder," Bill replied. "Ligurian whisky at twenty lire a bottle is calculated to make any one send in his checks. I believe they make it at Genoa for the benefit of the unfortunate seamen who come on shore with a thirst. What an awful country this is for drinks! I'm going home, Tilda. I've got those homesick blues."

Tilda's voice shook a little as she asked him when he intended to leave San Bartolomeo, but her momentary loss of control passed unnoticed.

"Oh, quite soon," he said vaguely. "To-morrow, perhaps, or next week. I don't know."

Nina and her friends arrived at the Villa at eleven o'clock in a state of uproarious gayety. Miss Wigsworth had gone to bed, in order to cry in comfort, and Bill, sulky and consumed with jealousy, had gone out to get drunk. The party had brought their own bottles with them. Mr. Buck-Harris and Commander Hillier never took any risks where drinks were concerned. Their tippie was the best Scotch whisky and they took care that they never ran short of it. Piers and his lady, born spongers that they were, always followed the bottle (when some one else had paid for it) as closely as trade is said to follow the flag. Neither of them cared for poker, and Lady Susan

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had taken an active dislike to Nina. Nevertheless, lured on by the oblong parcel under the Commander's arm, they had attached themselves. Their technique of cadging, since it had been developed only to cope with Americans and with such dregs of the wealthy English middle-class as frequent Paris, Florence and other centers and wear "art costume" in the hope of concealing the fact that they are too lazy to work or even to wash, was a trifle crude for the surroundings in which they now found themselves. Their method was to smile a great deal all over their faces; to rush with suspicious haste into the use of other people's Christian names; to refer, by nickname, to high-sounding intimates (in whose company, however, they were never observed), and in general, for a carefully assessed consideration, to be prepared to give the innocent snobs on whom they batted the illusion of social progress. A title, any sort of title, is still, if properly manipulated, worth about a thousand a year in free meals and drinks, credit at hotels and restaurants, and borrowed tenners. But the Kernahans did not manage their assets with any skill, and usually confined themselves to what is called "Bohemia." In London and Paris, in Florence and in Rome, they had, like prostitutes of a worthier type, their familiar beats. Away from their adopted dunghills, they lost confidence and were as nervous of their behavior—under a brazen exterior—as the children of poor but dishonest parents in the formidable houses of the really great.

Nina was much too much preoccupied with her

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own emotions to notice any of her guests very carefully. She did not even observe the growing chilliness towards the Kernahans of Mr. Buck-Harris and his friend. Her nerves were strung to breaking-point and she knew that she was capable of any folly. She was in a mood of perfect recklessness. She wanted a scene—shouts, blows, screams, brutality. She wanted her ears boxed. She wanted a beating: then she would be good.

A corkscrew, a siphon, and some glasses were collected; the players—all of whom were already exhilarated—were provided with high balls by the gallant sailor, and the game began. Not for nothing did the Kernahans dislike poker. Neither of them was expert at cheating at cards, and their only way of escape, when the play went against them, was to forget their indebtedness and depart in a hurry. As steadily as Nina won the Kernahans lost; and, small though the stakes were, they could not afford to lose, because they could not afford to run away. They had invested too much time and attention in paving the way, with this obviously solvent group of people, for a small loan, to be at all anxious to leave hurriedly before they had raised it. A wrinkle of care appeared on Lady Susan's far from candid brow when she lost a second hundred lire note.

The play had been going on for about an hour when Bill appeared, with Giles. They greeted the company, accepted drinks, but declined Nina's invitation to join in the game. After a few minutes, Bill, who was only too obviously in a jealous rage,

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suggested to Giles that they should take out the boat and bathe.

"Those Kernahans make me sick," spluttered Bill, his usually good-humored face contorted with annoyance. "Nina's lust for fresh people to find her charming is positively insatiable."

"I'm beginning to think that women, on the whole, are a curse," said Denham, with cheery insincerity. "They play the deuce and all with a fellow's peace of mind. On the other hand, they keep us moving, bless them."

They took their clothes off, and then shoved the clumsy boat, which Nina and Bill hired by the month from one of the fishermen, over the baulks of timber into the sea. Bill gave it a last violent push and sent it shooting out over the shallow, tranquil waters of the bay. The moon, an absurdly artificial, theatrical affair, glittered down from a black velvet sky and made their bodies gleam as they strode towards their craft. "God, it's good to get one's clothes off," said Bill, taking the oars and pulling out towards the open sea. The breeze caressed them: it was exquisite, after the heat of the day.

Giles, with the caution of his forty years, was inclined to be nervous about bathing when in the early stages of intoxication. To keep Bill company in his depression he had drunk an unusual quantity of rather dubious brandy. When they got into deep water, he took a header over the side, to see what happened. The results reassured him. When he turned over on his back and floated,

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he felt a sensation of ineffable comfort and well-being which the amount of alcohol he had consumed merely enhanced. Above him and all round him the theatrical Italian night was producing its best effects. He could see the yellow lights in the Villa Aurelia; and in a large villa close to the shore two or three couples were dancing to a gramophone.

“Maggie! Yes, Ma.
Come right upstairs . . .”

The words of the song came floating out across the water. A large car with blazing headlights appeared on the Oneglia road, and Denham watched it as it swept round the bay en route for Alassio. The mountain peaks behind San Bartolomeo were darkly outlined against the moon-bathed sky, and in the high villages a few golden lights still twinkled. Everything was hushed and mysterious, and yet curiously alert. In Italy, at night, you rarely get the impression that the world is sleeping. Birds and beasts and fishes all may be at rest; but somewhere you feel that there are men and women all around you, silent, stealthy, but intensely wakeful.

Bill was swimming out to sea. His arm gleamed as with each stroke he lifted it from the phosphorescent water. Denham clambered back into the boat and began to row after him. He felt unusually happy, unreasonably happy. For an hour at all events, he had been set free from the bondage of his unsatisfactory passion. He was his own man again, naked and free. If the state of being in

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love is really a form of insanity, then this was a lucid interval.

Bill was less fortunate, for his long swim had not saved him from his accumulated ill-humors. He was as sore and dejected when he returned to the boat and resumed his clothes as he had been when he started.

Denham went off to bed to sleep long and dreamlessly, and Bill strode back to the Villa Teresa brooding over his wrongs. The party had broken up and the guests were gone home. Nina was sitting, in orange silk pyjamas, in a deck chair, smoking a cigarette. A very yellow whisky-and-soda stood by her side. The table was littered with cards and counters, and the whole room wore a debauched look which it had not had before in Bill's recollection.

"Bill, I do think you might have stayed and been civil to my friends," said Nina angrily, when Bill appeared in the doorway. The game stopped five minutes after you and Giles arrived. You might have waited and been sociable. After all, even if you don't like them, they were guests of the house. One does owe some sort of consideration . . ."

"I like that. Consideration, indeed!" Bill could hardly speak for anger.

"Yes, consideration. You might show *me* a little consideration, I think. After all, you are my guest."

Neither Bill nor Nina was really mean over money matters. Bill paid his full share of the

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housekeeping expenses, and contributed a great deal more than Nina ever noticed of the cost of their joint hospitality and of the amusements which they shared in common. In suggesting that Bill was under an obligation to her she was merely being provocative.

"Your friends, indeed!" said Bill, in a rage. "Can't you see how you humiliate yourself by cringing to all the rag-tag and bobtail you pick up at Alassio and at the Paradiso? You arrange to go out somewhere with me, and then spend hours sucking up to some horrid old cat of a woman you've met on the beach or in a shop. The other day you kept me waiting for two hours and all you had to say, when you did appear, was that Mrs. Balfour liked you ever so much better than she liked the Crowleys! You are diseased with vanity, Nina, that's the trouble. You haven't an ounce of self-respect. What on earth does it matter to you whether Mrs. Balfour likes you? You don't like *her*, presumably, because you pull her to pieces whenever you mention her name. As for the Kernahans . . ."

"Really, Bill, you are impossible," said Nina. "I've stood it long enough. . . ."

"You pretend to care about your reputation," Bill went on, "but you behave like a maniac. If any one ought to know what these Ligurians are like, *you* ought to! After all, you've got your children to consider and your husband. But the other day, when the amorous Benedetto came in to visit you from Oneglia, I could see you from the

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beach standing with him in front of the window, with the light behind you. The whole town could see you."

"You *dare* suggest that there was anything to see," cried Nina. "You cad!" She leapt to her feet, flew at Hepburn in a frenzy, and struck him a series of resounding blows upon the face. The opportunity for a first-class scene, for which she had so long been waiting, had come at last, and she used it to the full. Pin-points of fire appeared in her eyes; she had the beauty of a wild animal. Her great mass of tangled brown hair seemed to become electric. For so small a woman her blows had an astonishing amount of force behind them.

Bill stiffened and became immobile and rigid under her attack. He moved not a muscle. Nina's blows brought out in him all his natural fastidiousness, his native dislike of scenes and brawls, and his distaste for disorderly women. At that moment he seemed to Nina as odiously English as her own husband, whose worst fault, in her eyes, was that he had always stedfastly refused to play up to her in her more magnificent moments. She herself, through her grandmother—who was alleged to be Italian but was more probably a Jewess—had a strain in her of warm Southern blood, which forced her at intervals to seek a dramatic outlet for her nervous energy. When Nina's nerves had, so to speak, exploded over Bill's defenseless head, she sank back into her chair, buried her face in her hands, and began to sob, in a voluptuous ecstasy of grief. Bill struck a match and phlegmatically

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lighted a Macedonia cigarette. He declined to be melted by her tears.

"Italian peasants," he observed, "if they see an officer and an English signora alone in a room together at night, draw only one conclusion from it. This doesn't happen to be England, you know. You may be as innocent as a new-born babe, and I never hinted or suggested that you were not. All I *did* say was that you behaved like a fool. Every man and woman in the district will have heard by this time that you are a woman of loose morals. I admit it doesn't much matter what they think. But my warning was entirely well-intentioned."

"It wasn't," sobbed Nina. "You were just jealous and wanted to hurt me."

Bill sighed. "We seem to have succeeded in hurting each other rather a lot in the last fortnight. I suppose, in coming here like this, we both of us took on rather more than we could manage. We've had our lesson."

"Bill!" Nina lifted up her tear-stained, agonized face and stretched out her arms to her lover. "Forgive me, dearest. Forgive me." She went to him, clasped him round the waist and pressed her head against his heart. "Don't be hard and angry," she murmured. "I'm sorry I lost my temper."

Bill's resolution held out no longer. In a frenzy of passion he clasped her close to him and poured out his love for her. "It can't go on, dearest," he murmured. "We must write and tell Hugo and get him to divorce you. He won't be cruel

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about the children. We are only destroying ourselves like this, ruining everything, injuring even our love for one another. It isn't right, Nina."

"Carry me to bed, dear," said Nina. "I'm so tired, so hopelessly and horribly tired."

She clung round his neck and he lifted her like a child—she was little heavier than the average girl of thirteen—and carried her into her room.

"Stay with me for a little while," she said.

"Nina, it must be yes or no, now. We've got to decide."

"Don't make me decide to-night. In the morning I'll tell you. I've got to think about the children. God knows, my dear, I love you. I love you only too well. But I was bred in a convent, and I can't shake off from my mind the things that I was taught. About divorce, particularly. Hugo is my husband, and even if I leave him he will go on being my husband. I mean, in my heart I shall think of him like that. I am not happy with him, but he has always been good to me, Bill. You know he has. I have nothing to reproach him for. I don't love him—but something holds me, I don't know what it is. Kiss me, my darling, and leave me."

They kissed one another, a devastating kiss of passionate love. "Perhaps in the morning I shall be stronger—or weaker."

"We must decide then," said Bill. "We have both reached breaking-point. It's the end or the beginning."

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He stumbled away to his room, undressed and sank into a profound slumber.

The next morning he rose early and went down to the sea to bathe. Afterwards he walked into the town and drank his caffè-latte at the Caffè Roma. He felt reluctant, on this decisive morning, to return to the Villa Teresa to face the children and Miss Tilda Wigsworth and Chiara and Giovanni. He hoped that if he sat at his table long enough Nina would be inspired to come and look for him. Their fateful meeting would be easier for both of them if it took place in public. Nina justified the confidence which he had placed in her clairvoyance. He saw her a long way off, coming towards him. She was dressed in her familiar red frock and wore no hat. Her face looked haggard under her paint and her eyes were strained and weary as she sank into the vacant seat by his side. She laid her small brown hand on his and looked at him, without speaking. For a moment she could not speak. Her eyes were filled with tears and her lips trembled. Bill himself was in little better case. He guessed at once what she had come to say to him, and since he dared no longer think of the future, his mind traveled back over the past, their past—the adventures they had embarked upon together, the sweet companionship, the idiotic jokes. They had been good friends—such good friends—as long as it was humanly possible. And now the end had come, prefaced by two weeks of quarreling and exasperation and ugliness. The situation had proved too much for

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them. Ordinary human nature could bear no more: either they must take one another for better or for worse, or else they must part. When he looked, in an agony of suffering, into Nina's anguished eyes, he read her decision.

"It's no good, my dear," she faltered. "I can't do it. I can't, I can't, I can't. I'm not a free agent. I'm a wife and a mother. I can't sacrifice my kids; and I should never know a moment's peace of mind if I behaved rottenly to my husband. I heard from him this morning. He trusts us both. I don't know whether it's because I'm not weak enough or because I'm not strong enough, but I can't come away with you and burn my boats. I oughtn't to have put this strain on you. It wasn't fair. Forgive me, dearest."

Bill took her narrow wrist in his and lifted her hand to his lips. "I don't think that either of us is really to blame," he said. "And there is certainly nothing to forgive. I must go away, my darling. It's the only thing to do. I'll go this afternoon, to Alassio. Giles—unless I'm very much mistaken—will be going back to England very soon. We'll travel back together. There's a blight over this place. We shall none of us have any peace until we escape from it."

"I feel that, too. I'm frightened, Bill dear. I wish I were back in my home where I belong. I'm afraid of what I'll do. Every atom of will I possess has been exhausted in trying to do right now. I've no more resistance left in me."

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"It's the end, Nina. But it has been good on the whole, hasn't it?"

"Yes, my dear. It has been good."

Veronica and Giles interrupted this conversation. They both seemed in the best of spirits and were too cheerful to notice the distress of their friends.

"I say," said Bill, with a very praiseworthy imitation of his usual genial grin, "have either of you heard this one? The buttercup told it me in Alassio the other day.

" 'If skirts get any shorter,'
Said the flapper, with a sob,
'I'll have. . . . ' "

"Really, Bill," Veronica interposed, "it isn't like you to produce your chestnuts with a flourish! We all learnt that one at school."

Part ii

Chapter xii

THE fun was over. There was an "end of the season" feeling about San Bartolomeo for Nina, Veronica and Giles, now that Bill had departed, and the happy days of the early summer seemed incredibly remote. Nina spent her time with the Kernahans and with Mr. Buck-Harris and Commander Hillier; and Veronica occupied herself in keeping Giles amused during the long periods when Morwenna was too busy to see him. Morwenna, after the visit to Ormea with Giles, had retreated into her shell. She was suffering from a violent revulsion of feeling and regarded Denham almost with aversion. On several occasions she wrote to tell him that she could not marry him, but she never despatched the letters. She could not bring herself to be decisive, for she did not, as the saying is, know her own mind. For Denham, though he had become to some extent philosophical in regards to Morwenna's moods, the period was one of almost unendurable strain. He, too, was often driven to the point of desperation when he felt that either he must come to a definite understanding with Morwenna or return at once to London. It was only his realization of the violent conflict which was going on in her mind which made him bide his time.

A diversion was caused by the arrival at the

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Villa Aurelia of the long-heralded relations, together with their friend, Sir George Burnham. During the days immediately preceding this event, Morwenna became, as Veronica expressed it, "grander and grander." "Personally," Veronica once admitted, "I think Hetty's husband, the Reverend Vincent Hill-Browne of Beauchamp Mallet in the county of Somerset, is one of the most poisonous little men I've ever encountered. But don't tell Mops I said so, or she will flay me alive for my disloyalty to the family god."

Denham encountered the great ones on the beach on the day after their arrival. They were in charge of Morwenna and were upon him before he had a chance of escaping. He had just finished his bathe, and his matted hair, tennis shirt open at the neck, frayed canvas trousers and bare feet were in marked contrast to the elegant appearance of Morwenna's party. For a moment Giles wondered whether Morwenna intended to pass on without recognizing him. She gave him, however, a glacial half-smile.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Had your bathe yet?"

"No, not yet," Morwenna replied, "we are going to bathe this afternoon." She made no attempt to introduce him, and appeared to resent his familiarity in having addressed her. The pause which followed had an awkwardness entirely of her own making. Giles found himself being stared at by a little man in a gray flannel suit wearing a clerical collar and stock; by a younger though less attractive edition of Morwenna; and by a tall, gaunt individual with the eyes of a fanatic and a

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leering, insolent smile, who wore one of those floppy black hats with wide brims which are affected by imitation artists in Bloomsbury and Montparnasse. They looked at Giles as if he were a "sight," one of the many amusing things which Morwenna was doubtless going to exhibit to them.

Giles grew rather hot under their regard, and was annoyed with Morwenna for treating him to such an uncalled for display of her bad manners.

"I'm just off to Nina's," he remarked, picking up his towel and bathing things. "Do you know if Veronica is there?"

"I don't think so," said Morwenna, in her coldest tones. "I think my sister is at home."

They parted, and Denham—now in a black rage—strode off muttering "my sister!"

Veronica, as it happened, was at the Villa Teresa: she had taken refuge there. Bill's place as chief dispenser of drinks had been taken by Mr. Buck-Harris and Commander Hillier, acting as a small working committee. They were shaking the first cocktail when Giles arrived.

"Well, I've seen the family party!" said Giles, when, after greeting Nina and her guests, he found himself for a moment alone with Veronica.

"Oh, do tell me what you thought of them," Veronica cried. "Or oughtn't I to ask? Morwenna is always lecturing me about my unrefined habits. I'm afraid I shall never learn to be discreet."

"I didn't get an opportunity of thinking anything," Giles remarked. "I don't think Morwenna

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approved of my appearance. In any case she didn't introduce me."

Veronica flushed and bit her lip and changed the subject. "I've heard from Bill," she said. "He's sent me fifty quid in a draft on the Anglo-American agency, so that he didn't have to register the letter. Wasn't it thoughtful of him? If the letter had been registered Mops and mother would have been down on it like hawks. So now I'm free, Giles. Isn't it wonderful? God bless Bill! But I suppose I can't escape while the visitors are here."

"I've got a sister in London," said Giles, as they returned to the garden with the lemons of which they had been in search. "Would it help if she wrote to ask you to stay with her? I suppose it wouldn't do, though, for her to write," he reflected. "All the same she would be delighted to put you up, when you are in London. She has a biggish house in Cranley Gardens and a rather invisible husband and ten cats. You would be a godsend to her."

"You *are* a dear," said Veronica. "Nina has unearthed a sister, too. Perhaps it would be better tactics to begin on Nina's and then transfer to yours?"

"My child!" said Giles affectionately. "We'll fix you up between us, anyway. And I am sure Bill has whole colonies of relations, too."

The Kernahans arrived, as usual, with their tongues hanging out. "Mrs. Crowley has very kindly asked us to dinner to-night," Lady Susan

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observed to Veronica. "We met her with your sister and brother-in-law and Sir George Burnham on our way here."

"George Burnham!" Nina exclaimed. "Why, it can't be *the* George Burnham? It must be though. Well I'm blessed. What a lark!"

"Do you know him, Nina?" Veronica asked.

Nina chuckled. "I should think I do. I've known him ever since I was a child. He conducted one of his famous missions to me before I was sixteen. He struggled manfully to widen my outlook and put me in tune with the infinite, to make me really cosmic, in fact: but I am afraid I proved recalcitrant. You'd better be careful, Veronica. You'll find that George will begin to work amongst the Villa Aurelia in double-quick time."

Giles had listened to this conversation with as much philosophical detachment as he could muster. He saw quite clearly that no woman who cared a row of pins for her man would behave as Morwenna was behaving. Evidently, therefore, Morwenna did not care a row of pins. As far as he could gather, she even appeared to be rather ashamed of him. The situation was altogether too humiliating and he decided at all costs to bring it to an end.

The Kernahans and Mr. Buck-Harris and his friend departed at luncheon time, and Giles accepted Nina's invitation to stay and share her midday meal. The place seemed positively to swarm with children. Heaven only knew how they were all fed. Giovanni, also, decided to

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present himself at table that day. He had stolen some roses for his beloved signora, and had made himself useful about the house. He had fetched the oblong slab of ice and broken up what was required for the drinks, and had also, at Chiara's request, run down to the *piccola bottega* to buy the Chianti. He was a big boy and had a large mouth full of very white teeth, and large brown eyes which he constantly fixed on Nina in a melting and amorous regard. Miss Tilda Wigsworth, clean and starched as ever, struck Giles as being unusually depressed. She and Nina had evidently had a row. After luncheon he heard Nina's version of the affair and did not believe a word of it. The truth seemed to be that Miss Wigsworth, while bathing, had attracted the marked attention of the owner of the bicycle shop whom, up to that moment, Nina had regarded as her private property. This gentleman, a hirsute Hercules with a superb torso, admired in women a certain salient portion of the human anatomy in which Miss Wigsworth—unlike the boyish-looking Nina—happened to be remarkably well-endowed. Her contours, as she stepped briskly through the shallow water in her one-piece bathing costume, had been sufficiently provocative to detach the youthful Signor Grasso from Nina's side and to urge him through the waves in pursuit of the English miss. A friendship had been struck up between the devastating Hercules and the shy and shrinking Tilda which Nina—with her passion for being the sun round which lesser lights revolved—

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could not tolerate. So she had taken it out of the wretched nursery governess on every possible occasion. Giles thought it hard on Miss Wigsworth, who could neither help the opulence of her curves nor be blamed for their effect upon the all-too-susceptible Ligurian male.

When Nina had stopped deploring Tilda's depravity, Giles was able to unbosom himself about his own trials and difficulties, and found her a wise counselor. "I should drop in to tea at the Villa Aurelia this afternoon, Giles," she said. "Why shouldn't you, man? You are much too much the timid lover. It doesn't pay with a woman like Morwenna. She wants standing up to. She isn't the clinging sort. There's a lot of good stuff in Morwenna, though, as you know, she isn't the type that I get on with. Get over your shyness and go and see what they do to you. If they are quite impossible, I should fade away from San Bartolomeo. It's the best thing you can do, my dear. Prolonging the agony won't do you any good. Besides, it is humiliating. It is not right for a man of your age and niceness to abase himself before any woman. The moth and the star attitude is one for romantic schoolboys to indulge in. Morwenna is just playing with you, and you shouldn't let her. If she really *does* mean business, be sure she will contrive to let you know it soon enough—after your departure."

Denham recognized this advice as being sound, and at five o'clock in the afternoon he presented himself at the Villa Aurelia. That his arrival,

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uninvited, was considered an intrusion by Mrs. Crowley was made abundantly clear. The family party was ranged round the dinner table, with Mrs. Crowley at its head. The conversation, when Denham entered the room, came to a full stop, and when he shook hands with his hostess she affected to have forgotten his name and greeted him with ill-concealed surprise. But for Veronica's gay greeting: "Hullo, Giles, how nice of you to come!" the situation would have been one to send the average man away from the house, never to return to it. He was given a chair next to Morwenna, and reluctantly introduced to the Hill-Brownes and to Sir George Burnham, who leered at him sardonically. The resumed conversation, in which Denham found it difficult to take part, concerned itself with speculations as to whether a certain famous woman writer was or was not a "lady." Giles listened, with a pang at the heart, while Morwenna summed up, judicially, against her distinguished rival. The parentage of Angela Kent was, it seemed, obscure—a fact which enabled her instinctively to gauge the popular taste. "She writes," said Morwenna, "as a middle-class woman. She understands the middle-class outlook and talks their language. That is why she is so popular."

"What an attractive woman Lady Susan is," Mrs. Crowley observed. "I am glad that she and her husband are coming here to-night. You will like to meet them, Vincent, I feel sure." She addressed her son-in-law, who seemed strangely

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unenthusiastic. The Kernahans, as it happened, came from his part of the world, and their reputation was anything but savory. Denham, while the uncomfortable meal progressed, took stock of his surroundings. Much as he loved Morwenna and fond as he was of Veronica, the family "atmosphere"—he had to admit—was to the last degree uncongenial. Mr. Hill-Browne was a little gnome-like man with dark hair receding from an egg-shaped face. He spoke in a chortling "High Church" voice that was conspicuously lacking in virility. Hetty Hill-Browne struck Denham as belonging to a familiar type of rather overbearing and socially pretentious parson's wife. She seemed entirely to lack the personal charm of her younger sisters. Burnham shone by contrast with Hill-Browne, for there was something big and ferocious about him. His hard blue eyes had in them a fanatical gleam, and Giles noticed that they devoured, alternately, Morwenna and Veronica.

As soon as he conveniently could, when tea was over, Denham took his departure. He decided to make his call a formal leave-taking, and when he shook hands with Mrs. Crowley he announced his imminent return to London. Morwenna showed no signs of disturbance at the news. She smiled at him genially, asked when he proposed to start and wished him a pleasant journey. It was the perfect dismissal.

Giles squared his shoulders and walked off under the palm trees of the Corso Garibaldi. *Souvent femme varie!* He realized, suddenly, that he was

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a middle-aged man and was thankful for it. The past few months had been a mistake, a foolish dream bred perhaps of idleness and sentimentality and mere sexual exasperation—that oldest of old snares for *l'homme moyen sensuel*. Oh, those Crowleys! Supposing Morwenna *had* married him. . . . The Hill-Brownes! Ma Crowley! What an escape! He felt in no mood to endure any more human contacts of any kind at San Bartolomeo and longed for the delicious loneliness of London. On his return to the Villa Rosa he hastily packed his clothes, wrote a short note to Morwenna to say good-by, giving her no address, and brief letters of farewell to Nina and Veronica, and then set out for the station to catch the 7.10 to Ventimiglia. Alone, in a first-class railway carriage, he heaved a sigh of sheer relief—the kind of relief that a man feels when he is leaving behind him, forever, a place in which he has made a complete and unmitigated ass of himself. “Nothing is more degrading to the nobler qualities of mankind than the operation of the sexual instinct when divorced from the sanctity of marriage and the home.” Giles meditated this rather pompous pronouncement, culled from one of Morwenna’s early novels, while the train hurried him towards the frontier.

Chapter xiii

AN inability to concentrate, at will, on the work in hand which is the besetting weakness of so many male writers, shows itself rarely in women, particularly in those who have had the good fortune to be educated in placidity. Morwenna had been "taught to sit still," until this difficult operation had become second nature to her. And, as a rule, when she sat down to work she neither fussed nor fidgeted, nor looked out of the window, nor indulged in vague day-dreams. Her theme and her characters occupied her to the exclusion of everything else. She knew precisely what she intended to do, and did it carefully and skilfully, choosing the suggestive word, chasing her own delicate perceptions and pinning them to her pages. She was a felicitous, unfaltering, deliberate writer with a great capacity for taking pains. As a rule she was easily able to prevent her "mind wandering," and up to the time of Giles Denham's abrupt departure from San Bartolomeo the number of mornings when she had sat down at her desk to produce her day's quota of two thousand words, and had failed to produce anything, had been very few, in all her writing life. But, whether there were some connection between the events or whether it were mere coincidence, the fact remained

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that during the week which followed Giles's return to England, Morwenna, on more occasions than she liked to remember, had been too much absorbed by her own sensations and emotional disturbances to be able to concentrate her thoughts on the creatures of her imagination. And she came to dread the nights when she lay, covered only by a sheet, under her mosquito net, unable to sleep and unable to escape her thoughts. She did not "miss" Denham in the ordinary sense. He had power to move her when he was present and at his most persuasive. Absent, he had no power over her whatever: and indeed it was this more than anything else which seemed to make it clear to her that she had never really loved him, never could love him. The whole affaire, she suspected, had been vaguely literary. She had watched herself in a situation like those she had so often created, and had deluded herself, at moments, into supposing that something real was happening to her. No, it was not Denham who was disturbing her. It was—so she put it to herself—her own soul. What was she going to do with her life? Was her talent, her "career" enough? If love came to her, how should she receive it? She did not consciously desire the commonplace experiences of sex. But were they so commonplace, after all? How would she feel if Veronica suddenly produced a husband or a lover? Would her vanity be—ever so slightly—hurt? Her vivid and not always just imagination, pictured a Veronica giving herself airs of superiority. "Poor dear Morwenna! The

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confirmed spinster!" But she *wasn't* a confirmed spinster. It was unfair because a woman had high standards and didn't jump incontinently at the second or third best when she encountered it, to accuse her of despising the common human lot. She longed to meet the man who could carry her by storm and make her wife and mother. Denham's love was much too like affection, it was too "fond" to produce in her anything but a desire to behave badly to him. Whatever it was, she did not—naturally—like the idea that it might die, that he might recover and transfer his fondness to some one else. At the back of her mind she regarded him as a piece of her property, for which she happened to have no immediate use. If another woman were to lay hands on it? The thought was displeasing. Nearly all Morwenna's thoughts, in these days and nights of urgent self-communion, were displeasing. As a distraction she spent more time than she would otherwise have done with her brother-in-law's eccentric friend, George Burnham. Morwenna had heard many rumors about George, and she had carried on a correspondence with him which had interested her. He was supposed to be a "man with a mission." He was a communist and a conscientious objector. But the communists had expelled him because of his pacifism and the pacifists had expelled him because of his communism: and both parties disapproved of him on personal grounds. For George was known to have a "gospel of love" which he preached with the ardor of a Messiah. He

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seduced the wives of his friends, whenever occasion offered, with the solemnity of a Baptist minister submerging a convert. The ladies invariably thought him a "wonderful man," and said so. Their husbands, usually puny and undersized intellectuals, gazed at George's massive frame and held their peace. They very often thought the more. Echoes of these vagaries of George Burnham's had come to Morwenna's ears and had endowed his personality with a certain pleasing, almost romantic interest. She liked him, too, because he was so "serious," and so unhappy. He seemed to her a tortured mystic, burning to set the world right—to redeem, to release, to point the way—and sadly misunderstood.

The Crowleys, with the exception of Veronica, were a united and self-sufficient clan. Friends had to graduate before inclusion in the sacred circle. Once within it they were treated as members of the family. George "belonged" because of some obscure relationship with Vincent Hill-Browne, and because Mrs. Crowley had a warm, a glowing affection for baronets. Much was allowed him that would not have been tolerated from one of lesser rank.

How strangely—thought Morwenna—he contrasted with the southern scene! There was something at once volcanic and yet wintry about George. He was a Yorkshire man and he would have been well enough in his place, striding across his native moors in tweeds, through a clinging wet mist. At San Bartolomeo he was as exotic as a polar bear.

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His family was respectable without being ancient. Its founder, the son of a yeoman farmer, had made a fortune as a manufacturer in the second half of the eighteenth century, had represented his native borough in parliament for many years and had been created a baronet. George was the fifth of his line. His father had married the pious daughter of a Wesleyan minister, and, as a reaction had taken to drink and dissipated the bulk of the family fortunes. George had now just enough on which to be idle without being comfortable. As a younger man he had been in the Navy and had retired with the rank of commander, after a confused scandal partly political, partly sexual, and partly religious. Now he spent his time roaming about, addressing meetings whenever he could find an audience, dreaming of revolution and talking about the great philosophical work which he intended, one day, to write. It was to be a new and glorious gospel—a gospel of love, a gospel of liberation.

George invariably chose women as his confidants. To his men friends, particularly to those of his own class, of whom he was singularly nervous, he never unbosomed himself.

Chapter xiv

MORWENNA'S friendship with George Burnham developed with rapidity. There was about George a dangerousness which Giles had lacked, and this quality, combined with his immense physique and his egoism and detachment, exercised a sort of fascination over her.

They first became intimate about a week after Denham's departure for London. Morwenna was walking by herself along a deserted stretch of sand some distance from the town of San Bartolomeo when suddenly she found herself confronted by George's towering figure. She had been so wrapped up in her thoughts that she had not noticed him until he was immediately upon her. He stood in front of her, barring her way, with his characteristic tortured smile upon his lips. "Hullo, Morwenna," he said. "Come up on the hillside and let us talk to one another. I'm glad I met you." Morwenna was too taken aback to refuse. They left the beach, crossed the white highway and followed a little path which led upwards through the terraced olive groves. They found a comfortable spot and settled themselves with their backs against the stone embankment of the terrace next above them. At their feet a little stream tinkled its way down towards the sea, and the whole pano-

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rama of the azure bay of San Bartolomeo lay outstretched beneath them. They could see the little white-sailed yachts flitting to and fro like white butterflies, and hear the distant cries of the bathers on the beach.

"What is worrying you, Morwenna?" asked George, with the particular form of truculence which he usually adopted with women. "I have been watching you for some time." She felt his odd eyes upon her, but would not meet them. "We all get worried at times," she rejoined, rather lamely. She was a reserved woman and fought against her desire to unbosom herself.

"Worry is good for the soul," said Burnham. "We should all become dead things if we didn't worry, and if we didn't desire and if we didn't love. It is the inability to love which leads to the worst of all forms of materialism, the materialism of the soul. It is the loveless who are really the coarse people, though they usually think themselves very much the reverse."

Morwenna looked at him now. She was caught in his booby trap. His remark annoyed her intensely, though she affected to agree with it. She felt herself to be, from this man's point of view, loveless. But she had no doubt whatever about her refinement. Coarseness was a quality which she detested and from which she instinctively shrank in others. She *hated* coarseness. "I dare say you think I am wrong," Burnham continued. "But that's only due to your preoccupation with surfaces. You know you never really dig down

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and analyze things." Morwenna flushed scarlet with anger.

"How do you know I don't? Have you read any of my books? I don't believe you've read a single line that I have written."

"No, but I have watched *you*."

"You may have watched me," she retorted, "but that doesn't mean that you know me. Why, we have hardly ever spoken to one another except about trivial things."

"Talk," said Burnham, "in ordinary social life is nothing but a screen which we put up round ourselves and from behind which we spy upon our neighbors. The screen itself is thus only interesting to other people when it is inadequate. Your screen is often inadequate, believe me, when you are least aware of the fact."

"I don't believe you," Morwenna snapped. "I don't believe you know anything at all about me, really. It is all pure guesswork on your part, and your guesses are totally wrong."

"Did you really think you loved that man Denham?" The question was shot at her abruptly. Morwenna winced. "Why do you ask?" she temporized. Her tone was sub-acid and conveyed clearly enough, "What business is it of yours?"

George stretched out his long limbs and stuffed his hands into his trousers' pockets and looked up at the sky, while Morwenna brooded darkly.

"I ask because—well, because I believe there is something really fine in you—a treasure waiting to

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be unlocked. And it was my impression that Denham would never find the key."

There was nothing to be done now. Morwenna's chance of resisting this man's personalities had gone by. And the delights of talking about herself were beginning to seduce her, to break down her defenses. After all, it was an interesting topic. Was there any topic in the world quite so enthralling? Perhaps there were even richer treasures of delicate feeling and perception inside herself than those of which she was already so pleasantly conscious. She considered it not unlikely. Did she not love "Beauty" with all her heart and mind and soul? Particularly with her soul. She felt that her soul was a very beautiful soul; and she was glad that her body, which was its temple, was beautiful too. She used much soap and hot water and wore fine underclothing purely for her soul's benefit.

"I don't think I really know very much about love," said Morwenna gravely. "I mean as far as my personal experience is concerned. I am very fond of Giles and very sorry for him, and at times he has power to move me. But, I agree, that isn't enough. . . ."

George turned upon her his bright fanatical glance, and Morwenna recognized in him the visionary, though she failed at the same time to detect the middle-aged sexual expert. "Love," said he, "has nothing to do with fondness, and not as much as you may think to do with compassion. It is a great dynamic force, a liberating force, the

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force which can alone set free the imprisoned personality. Denham will never awaken you. Even if you married him, it would make no difference. He has not the key to a nature like yours. You would remain locked up. . . ."

Somewhere deep down in Morwenna's brain there stirred a faint suspicion that this man was talking nonsense. But when she encountered Burnham's uncanny eyes the suspicion vanished. Whatever may have been the value of what he was saying, there seemed no doubt that the man believed it himself. There was a glitter in his eyes of morbid egoism and his voice had the fierce conviction of the self-deceiver who, having made an image of himself in his own mind, blindly worships that image. But Morwenna did not know this. To her, as to her many predecessors, there was about George something of a prophet's glamour. She was thrilled, shaken off her balance. His "methods," which owed much of their success to the fact that they were largely instinctive and unconscious, had begun already to have their effect. In an effort to change the conversation, to give herself time to recover, she called George's attention to a "Santa Catarina" in the grass by her side. "Look," she cried. "Don't move, or it will fly away. Isn't it exquisite! I'll try to catch it and ask it our fate. The children here say that it always tells the truth. '*Sempre vero*'!" Stealthily she stretched out her little claw-like hand and caught the insect in a secure but tender grip. It was a sort of praying mantis with a body sheathed in pale-green wings,

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edged with pink. It had a singularly wise, small head, and long jointed legs almost as fragile as those of a daddy-long-legs.

"Santa Catarina," crooned Morwenna, holding the insect in front of George Burnham. "Paradiso?" The creature at once lifted its thin black legs towards the sky. "Well, I never," Morwenna laughed. "It approves of you anyway. What about me, my dear?" she asked, holding the Santa Catarina in front of her smiling eyes. "Paradiso? Inferno?" The creature at once stretched its legs downwards towards the nethermost pit. "Well, that's that," said Morwenna lugubriously. "Fly away, darling, and change your mind!" The Santa Catarina, having performed its prophetic duties, returned sulkily to the grass.

Morwenna lay luxuriously on her back looking up through the gray-green leaves of the olive tree above her at a sky of deepest azure. "If only this were enough," she said. "This sky, this sunshine."

It was no use. George Burnham was wound up. His eyes burned her. The trivial interruption made by the visit of the "Santa Catarina" had merely irritated him. He did not propose to talk about the sea and the sunshine. "Don't run away and hide, Morwenna," he snapped. He seized her bare arm in his enormous grip, and she could feel the magnetism from his body running through her in electric waves. The distinguished novelist became submerged in the agitation of the unsatisfied woman. "Morwenna," George continued, in his

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vibrant, rasping voice, "do you know you would make a wonderful friend if you were to come to life—if we could get upon the same plane. I want a friend. Sometimes my work is so disheartening I nearly go mad. There is so much to be done, there are so many people to be shaken out of their deadly lethargy. The spiritual values of everything have become obscured in the years of bloodshed and hatred and lust through which Europe has passed. We have denied love, and either ignored or deliberately misinterpreted the teachings of Christ, and as a result we see all around us dead souls, choked by materialism. But the few must be awakened to a realization of the meaning of life, to save the others. There must be cosmic consciousness. It is the older races and the older souls who must apply the brake, who must steady the Western world in its headlong rush to destruction. The proletariat now are like little children led astray by dishonest and corrupting teachers. They must be saved from their slavery, Morwenna. And the dead, sexless, soulless women of our class must learn what life means, learn the magical and splendid secret of their own bodies. Without this awakening there can be no real purity. It is fire that purifies. Women who have no passion, whose capacities remain buried and unrealized can have no virtue either. . . ."

The words had broken out of him in great gusts. He might have been haranguing an entire nation. He stopped abruptly, jumped to his feet and stared down at the blue laughing sea with his arms stretched

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behind him, his fists clenched, his head thrown back. The sea, far away below, continued to indulge in baby-laughter, laughter more profound perhaps than all the truths of all the ages. But Morwenna did not notice the sea's wise, many-twinkling smile. She was stirred to the core of her being. She was like a harp whose deepest chord has been plucked by the harpist's finger. She rose trembling to her feet and without knowing what it was that she wanted to say, she called his name.

"George!"

He turned sharply and strode towards her, his blue eyes on fire. For a moment he seemed to tower above her, a broad-shouldered giant of unimaginable strength. She was powerless, defenseless before him. Who could doubt that he was "sincere"? He wanted her, surely he wanted her! She felt, in that moment of absolute surrender, that she meant everything to the man who had taken her captive. And the deeper intuition which told her that, at the same time, she meant nothing, invested him in her eyes with all the highest human values.

"Morwenna," he said thickly. "Morwenna!"

She hung limply in his embrace, her breasts pressed against him, her lips crushed and mastered by his mouth. Time seemed to stand still. Her whole body thrilled with new and unimagined sensations. The kiss seemed unending. She longed for it not to end; and yet it was not to be endured. At last he released her, and she stood before him breathless with heaving bosom and drooped head.

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"They always look like that," he reflected complacently, "when it's going to be all right." The mission preacher in him again changed places with the sensualist.

"George," faltered Morwenna, in the voice of a frightened girl rather than that of a famous woman whose life history is recorded in "Who's Who," "why did you do that?"

"It was the seal of our friendship, dear child," he said, with gravity and unction. "Now we can really help one another. The barriers are broken down between us. The stores of love within you, once they are unlocked, will enrich you all your life. Your cosmic consciousness . . ."

But Morwenna, who throughout her repressed and circumspect life had found but little occasion for tears, was now crying unrestrainedly. He drew her to him again and she buried her damp face in the comforting folds of his coat. "I won't," she said to herself. "I won't. It's all so cliché, so Ethel M. Dellish, so . . . so common." Her pride stabbed her, lacerated her. All her reserves of character she called desperately to her rescue, and with a brusque movement she tore herself free from George's arms. "I'm going home," she said crossly. "Heaven knows what I look like!" She seized her bag and made her way down to the stream and dipped a tiny handkerchief in the water. Her pocket glass confirmed her worst suspicions. Faced with the necessity of restoring her looks, all her self-control came back to her. It was a desperate situation! What fools men were

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never to understand these things. She held up the little glass and powdered herself carefully. Her cheeks were flushed and she had no need for rouge, but she applied rather more lip-stick than usual. At last when she had smoothed her dark hair, put her hat on straight and shaken the twigs and dry grass from the folds of her frock she felt more or less able to face the world. "It must be lunch-time," she said over her shoulder, to the strangely silent George. He came to her, smiling, and would have embraced her again but she pushed him angrily away. "Come on," she said. "Let's go down to the beach."

"Can't the great fool see I've just done up my face?" was what she thought as she went on ahead down the narrow path. And George, who followed her meekly, reflected: "It's all right. I knew it would be." He had no need to be impatient.

They debouched from the shady pathway through the olive groves on to the blinding whiteness of the highway and ran straight into the very last people that either of them wished to meet. Round a bend in the road, striding towards their pre-luncheon cocktails, came Nina and Piers Kernahan. Kernahan looked very spruce in white ducks. Nina was dressed in her favorite frock of blood-red muslin which accentuated the Southern look given her by her tangled mass of brown hair. She swung a hat of white woven straw in her hand, and both George and Morwenna saw that her dark eyes were sparkling with malicious amusement. "Hullo," she cried. "Have you two been admiring the view

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from the olive groves? Piers and I have been right to the top of the hill and are hungry as lions. Come along home and have a drink. You don't seem very affable to your little Nina, George. Don't you remember Culmshott and the Christmas you spent at my Aunt Mary's?" George did remember, only too well. He had carefully, and hitherto successfully, avoided Nina in consequence. "Why, of course," he said. "It's Nina Winslow. . . ."

"As was, my dear," Nina corrected.

They sorted themselves into couples, and as Morwenna walked by the side of Piers Kernahan and discussed the forthcoming fête at Alassio, the breeze blew her a chance phrase from the conversation of the pair in front. "At it again, George?" Nina asked. "Liberating feminine repressions and increasing cosmic consciousness? Really, I'm ashamed of you!"

"You don't understand," George replied angrily.

Morwenna heard no more.

Chapter xv

“I SHALL simply love having Veronica with me,” Nina cooed. She had put on her demurest frock and her demurest manners and called upon Mrs. Crowley to break the news that she was carrying off her younger daughter. Mrs. Crowley’s attitude was far from gracious. She did not approve of Nina and regarded her morals as deplorable. On the other hand her husband was, it seemed, a respectable and responsible doctor of medicine, and the creature herself was at least a lady. And then, her offer to take Veronica off her hands for six months was not to be dismissed lightly. Veronica might come across a suitable young man at Mrs. Harding’s and thus get “settled.” Veronica’s future was a source of considerable anxiety to Mrs. Crowley. There was a lack of balance, a flightiness about her youngest daughter which caused her apprehension. Once safely married to some one who *belonged* and was also in a position to keep her as a lady should be kept, and her responsibility would be over. She herself intended to return to Somerset with her married daughter to pay a long visit, and the presence of Veronica would certainly have been a nuisance. Hetty and Vincent, after all, hadn’t any too much room at Beauchamp Mallet. . . .

“It is very kind of you, Mrs. Harding,” Mrs.

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Crowley observed. "Very kind indeed. Of course I know you'll remember what a child Veronica is, and not encourage her to have too many late nights. Not that she needs much encouragement, I'm afraid." Mrs. Crowley sighed and smiled a grim smile.

"Oh, *I'll* look after her, Mrs. Crowley," said Nina brightly. "We live a very quiet life in London and I spend as much time as I can, with the children, at our little cottage in Dorset. Veronica is very fond of my brats and so are they of her. She will be a godsend to me."

Morwenna came into the room at this moment and Mrs. Crowley, with the touch of deference in her tone which she always assumed for Morwenna's benefit before strangers, imparted the news of Mrs. Harding's invitation. Morwenna put on her armor. Her smile was radiant, but her eye had a glint like the flash of a sword blade. "Veronica's a lucky child!" she said. "It's awfully decent of you, Nina. If you find her too much for you send her along to keep me company. I shall be back in my flat at Hampstead in September. We shall meet, anyway, I hope."

"Rather," Nina replied, enthusiastically. She saw the glint in Morwenna's eye, but she saw a good deal more than that. She saw her excitement and personal preoccupation. This was not the Morwenna of two months ago. Nina disliked her friend intensely, but she was "decent"—to use the schoolboy phrase—to other women, when it was humanly possible to be so, and she wanted to be

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decent now. Should she warn the poor thing about George? And was there any way of conveying a warning which should be effective to a woman of Morwenna's pride? Poor George! Pleased to ruin others' wooing, never happy in his own! A middle-aged cuckoo; a professional maker of cuckolds; and all for the greater glory of God and the advancement of humanity! "I wonder how near he got to seducing me at Aunt Mary's," Nina reflected. "At all events he was the first man who ever kissed me." The incident, vivid and unforgettable, stood out in her memory, and she bore George no ill-will for it, though in retrospect she found it hard to forgive the "tall talk," which had accompanied his attempts at love-making. "It was that 'holy Joe' stuff that saved me, though," she thought. "Apart from that, which any one but a fool could see through, the old snake had the devil of a way with him. He has even now, perhaps. Poor Morwenna! Poor George!"

Vincent Hill-Browne and his wife now made an impressive entry, and Nina felt that her demureness would not last much longer. They all talked about Veronica's invitation as though she were a child fresh from school, instead of an experienced young woman of twenty-three with a will of her own and a perfect legal right to exercise it. Once again Nina found herself marveling at the Crowley family. How on earth did they manage to preserve this 1880 manner and outlook?

She got up to go as soon as she could, and as she said good-by she invited Morwenna to come

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back with her to the Villa Teresa. Morwenna consented and the two women left the house together and walked down on to the beach. The sea was deepest blue and calm as a lake. Away on the farther arm of the bay the houses of Cervo, grouped round its baroque parish church, gleamed in the bright sunshine.

"I shall be glad to get away from all this," said Nina, at last, with a comprehensive sweep of her hand. "I love it dearly and I adore the Italians, but one wants a rest from it. At least I do. It is all too bright and glittering. I feel now as if I should like to be in a Scotch mist. Sometimes I have a longing to feel the small rain on my cheeks. Even the smoky haze of London would be grateful and comforting. You are all going home too, aren't you?"

"All except me," said Morwenna. "I shall stay on till the first of July. That's when our tenancy is up. But Mother and Hetty and Vincent go off two days after you."

"And George?" Nina could not keep her voice entirely expressionless, though she tried.

"Oh, George, of course, is going on the same day," Morwenna replied, with a short, rather harsh laugh. "But he's not going straight back to England. He talked of walking up into the mountains and staying for a while at Ormea; but I don't think his plans are settled."

"Ormea? That's the place Giles once went to and didn't like, isn't it?" Nina was now growing decidedly feline. She couldn't help it.

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"Yes," said Morwenna, laconically. How she detested this woman!

They had regained the road and were nearing the Piazza Umberto and the palm-shaded tables of the Caffè Roma when suddenly Nina exclaimed: "Talk of the devil!" George was coming towards them, with Veronica. They were striding along, talking with much animation. Veronica, a charming figure in a diaphanous green muslin frock, looked flushed and rather serious. Nina's lips set in a hard line. George was really getting beyond a joke. Veronica was the first to see them and Nina thought that she detected, and could account for, a certain look of relief in the girl's eyes. The troubled expression faded and gave way to her fascinating boyish grin.

"Come along home, both of you," Nina commanded, "and let's see if we've got any gin left. *You* look as if you wanted a drink, George," she added, maliciously. "I suppose you have been exploring Veronica's complexes and awakening her cosmic consciousness?"

"Cocktails will always remind me of dear Bill," Morwenna interposed brightly. "What has happened to him, Nina? Do you hear from him?" Nina winced. For a little while she was silent, wrestling with a spasm of pain that was almost unbearable. Usually it was only at night when she lay sleepless and restless under the mosquito net, that these dreadful moments of agony came to torture her. Morwenna had taken her by surprise, and it required all her strength of mind to enable her to answer in a natural voice. "Oh,

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didn't Giles tell you?" she asked, hoping that Morwenna had been too preoccupied to notice the pause before her reply. "The two of them are sharing chambers in the Temple and Bill is writing a play. They seem awfully happy. I had a joint letter from them the day before yesterday."

It was Morwenna's turn to cry "touchée," but, unlike Nina, it was her pride and not her heart that suffered. She hated Nina to know that Giles had not written to her and that she did not even know his address. "I'm afraid Giles is annoyed with me for not having answered his last letter," she remarked, rather unconvincingly. "But I'm a perfectly hopeless correspondent. Do give them both my love when you write again."

"But we shall see them in about a week's time, shan't we, Nina?" Veronica put in. "Rather!" said Nina. "We'll ring them up and ask them to dinner as soon as we arrive. It's queer how dull this place is without them. Not a single *conte drolatique* has passed my lips for weeks! Come, George. Don't you know any really shocking limericks to add to our répertoire?"

"I'm afraid I don't find smoking-room stories amusing," said George, savagely. "Particularly on the lips of women."

"Dear me. Every psychologist knows what *that* means. What a real scoundrel you must be then, George," Nina retorted. "I always suspected you of it! Your subconscious must be as foul as that of any president of a purity league. You want

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spring-cleaning, my dear! I shall have to conduct a mission to you."

"We look at things differently," said George. His face was flushed with heavy northern rage. He had no armor against mockery; and he was nervous lest Morwenna should be influenced by Nina's obvious efforts to discredit him. Could he have seen into the workings of Morwenna's mind he would have been reassured, for she was quite as furious with Nina as he was himself.

When they reached the Villa Teresa Commander Hillier and Mr. Buck-Harris were already seated in their favorite chairs under the acacia tree. On the table between them stood bottles, glasses and a cocktail shaker. Miss Wigsworth hovered near them, displaying to the eyes of her elderly admirers her delightful capacity for looking clean. Even Nina was forced into a grudging admiration of Tilda's "washed" look. So many impassioned bathers, men and women, never acquire it. It was one of Tilda's greatest assets, that and her milk-white skin.

The elderly gentlemen rose with some difficulty from their chairs. "Hillier has just shaken something really good," Mr. Buck-Harris observed. "He improvised it while we were waiting for you." Tilda had already slipped away into the house to fetch some glasses. She had the warm instinct for hospitality which is so often one of the rather tragic virtues of the homeless.

When the party had settled down and a favorable judgment had been passed upon Commander

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Hillier's cocktail, Nina found herself speculating as to the cause of the queer, but so apparent, cleavage between "her sort of people" and Morwenna's. They just didn't mix. There was an unbridgable gulf between them. But was it a question of temperament, of upbringing, or of blood strains? No foreigners could be more foreign to herself and her friends than George and Morwenna. Veronica, Tilda, Giles Denham, Bill, these two old dears who lived for their drinks, even the Kernahans, all, at least, talked the same language. But the Crowleys (Veronica always excepted) and George, and the Hill-Brownes—they belonged to a world of their own, secret and inviolate and in every outward appearance, most unpleasant. "Perhaps, though," Nina reflected, "it is only that people are divided into those who are *simpatico* to oneself and those who are the reverse, and there's nothing more in it than that." George consumed his cocktail in gloomy silence. Morwenna, who had an instinctive liking for men with naval or military (or indeed any other sort of) titles, was chatting brightly and efficiently to Commander Hillier. Veronica was flirting with Mr. Buck-Harris in the way that a delightful daughter will flirt with her father.

"Have you heard anything from the Kernahans since they left?" Morwenna suddenly asked, addressing the company at large. There was a noticeable pause and Mr. Buck-Harris grew pinker than usual. Nobody had heard from those charming adventurers. Neither Nina, who had

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parted with a thousand lire note to Lady Susan, nor Mr. Buck-Harris who had lent Piers Kernahan fifty pounds, was indeed ever likely to hear from them again. "Mother had a card the other day from Lady Susan," Morwenna continued. "It was from Paris but they didn't give their address. I wondered if you knew it." Nobody did. Nina had her own reasons for not wishing to dwell upon the Kernahans. They had been the occasion of the worst row she and Bill had ever had, and she was not particularly pleased with her share in the matter, so she changed the conversation as quickly as she could.

"There's a sort of 'good-by' feeling in the air, isn't there?" she said. "I don't suppose any of us is ever likely to come back to San Bartolomeo. *I* couldn't, certainly. How do *you* feel, Morwenna?"

For once in a way Morwenna allowed herself to be human. She gave a little shudder and shook her head. "No," she observed, with finality. "I don't think I could come back here." Nina came nearer to liking her at that moment than she had ever come before. With this hurt and suffering Morwenna she could be friends: it was the indifferent, selfish, "superior" and self-centered novelist who roused her to rage.

"Meanwhile," Morwenna continued, "I think we ought to make a move. I expect you have plenty to do and Veronica, I know, hasn't attempted to do any packing." She rose, smiling, and kissed Nina lightly on both cheeks. "Good-

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by, dear, and bon voyage, in case I don't see you at the station. We shall meet in London in the Autumn, I hope." Nina, as she responded to these farewells, and watched Morwenna's graceful leave-taking, with George and Veronica so to speak under her wing, could not help admiring the way she did things. Morwenna was "really a lady" judged from the standpoint of our mothers and fathers. And underneath the composure of her manner and the elegance of her deportment there was, Nina suspected, something really fine, something which perhaps only adversity would bring to the surface.

"What a delightful creature that Miss Crowley is," Commander Hillier observed. "It's quite a relief to come across a woman with decent manners, nowadays. They've gone out of fashion I suppose."

"Surfaces change, but not essentials, surely," Nina replied. And Mr. Buck-Harris, who had been ruminating deeply, decided that she was right.

Chapter xvi

MORWENNA was a courageous woman, but Italy was Italy, and she had been warned frequently about the danger of sleeping alone in the Villa Aurelia. Sometimes as she sat in the evening on her balcony overlooking the bay, the warnings came into her head. How easy it would be for a wandering thief to climb up and enter her room through the open window! But she had her secret reasons for not caring. George was coming back! For the first few days after the departure of her relatives, she had reveled in her loneliness. A pleasant lassitude had come over her. It was as though she were resting after some gigantic struggle which had taxed all her energies. The battle was over and it had been decisive, though whether the result, from her own standpoint, should be considered a victory or a defeat, she did not know or care. It was enough for her to realize that there was no more fighting to be done. George was coming back. He had told her so, before he left for his tramp among the mountains. In imagination she could feel once more the firm grip of his strong arms, the pressure of his lips on hers. He would come back in his own good time *and he would find her waiting for him* and would take her. She scarcely thought about

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the future at all. The details of what might or might not happen to her in the months or years to come seemed infinitely unimportant in comparison with the essential fact of her own surrender. She liked to think of George tramping, all alone, among the high mountains. It fitted in with her conception of his character. He was a man who hungered to see God, a seeker after Truth, a man capable of exaltation and of spiritual ecstasies and, at the same time, all too human. She would soar with him to the heights, and she would watch over him like a mother when he fell to earth. And in so doing, though the thought was never consciously formulated in her mind, she believed that she would keep him. Instinctively the essential woman in Morwenna began to prepare the silken cords with which she would endeavor to bind her man to her side. In the meantime, with nerves at rest, without impatience, she waited for him to come back. She did not know how or when he would come, but she knew instinctively that he would not trouble to announce himself.

It was actually just seven days before the expiry of her mother's tenancy of the Villa Aurelia that George returned. Morwenna had been for a long midnight swim, across the moonlit waters of the bay, and had gone to bed and fallen into a deep sleep. She was awakened by a touch on her shoulder and woke with a start of terror, to hear her name called, with a softness and a gentleness that was unlike the George she knew.

"Morwenna," he almost whispered. "I've

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come back, my dear, and I'm tired out. Is there anything to eat?"

She rose in her bed, lifted the filmy white netting and emerged on to the stone floor with a little cry of joy on her lips. She hardly recognized herself. Was this really Morwenna Crowley or was it some stranger soul that had usurped her body? Who was it who was saying: "Oh, my dear, what a long, long time you have been?" She extricated herself from George's fierce embrace and carefully closed the window before turning on the light. She had neither fear nor any shame, only a thrill of happiness to see the admiration in his eyes. She slipped her bare feet into her *mules*, put a wrap over her thin silk nightdress, and led the way down to the kitchen. "There isn't much to eat, my dear, I'm afraid. There are a few eggs, I think, and bread and butter and a little fruit and half a bottle of Marsala."

"That's splendid," said George. "I'll slip into the sea for a minute while you are boiling the eggs." In the next room she heard him taking off his clothes. Then the front door opened and she heard the sound of his bare feet pattering down the garden path. By the time she had set the table clumsily—for Morwenna was one of those who had never been known to do anything for anybody and had no knack for the simplest of feminine domestic duties—he had returned. He stood in front of her with the water dripping off his great muscular body. His lips were drawn back and she could see his big white teeth under the clipped gray mustache.

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"Can you find me a towel?" he asked. She ran to her room to fetch him one, ashamed of herself for not having thought of it. How much she had to learn in those small ways! He dried himself with vigor, while she watched with a kind of fascination the play of the great muscles of his arms and shoulders. Then he went into the room in which he had left his haversack and returned in a torn and not too clean suit of pyjamas. "Heavens, I am hungry!" he said. "I've walked over twenty kilometres to-night. Right down the valley to Oneglia, and then on to here along the coast road." He scarcely glanced at her, but stared voraciously at the food, which he proceeded to devour like a famished animal. Morwenna, used to the small and jaded appetites of town-dwellers, was amazed at his capacity. He finished everything that she had set on the table, including an entire loaf, and drank the Marsala as if it were water. When he had finished he pushed back his chair and turned to her. "Come here, child," he said, "and kiss me."

She went obediently, sat herself on his big knees and put her thin arms round his neck and kissed him. At last, with a satisfied sigh, he put his arm under her knees and lifted her up as if she had been a baby. She asked no question and made no protest, and was carried, content and unresisting, up the stone staircase.

Chapter xvii

MORWENNA was the first to wake. She looked at her watch in the dim twilight that filtered through the *persiennes* and found that it was six o'clock. Disentangling herself from her lover's embrace she crept out of bed without waking him and threw open the green shutters. The sun burst in like a golden flood and with it came the morning breeze, a cool caress, borne in to her across the dark blue waters of the bay. George lay in a profound slumber. His mouth was partly open, showing his big white teeth, and in his sleep he looked at once elderly and childish. Morwenna felt a curious contraction of the heart as she gazed at him. Was it really she herself who felt all these emotions of pity and pride and grievous love; or some hitherto unknown personality that had shared her body with her all these years, unsuspected and unawakened? She felt dazed and light-headed. In a sort of dream she bathed and dressed herself, then went downstairs and collected George's clothes from the sitting-room before the grim-visaged Chiara should arrive and see them. George's old tweed coat, his flannel shirt and breeches had been flung over the arm-chair on which Mrs. Crowley had been accustomed to sit. Morwenna—and it was a sign of the change which had come over her—smiled to herself

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at the thought of what her mother would have said if she had seen them. She felt neither shame nor remorse for what had happened, though in connection with Giles Denham, to whom she had never completely given herself, she had felt both. There was something inevitable about George.

She walked slowly up the stone staircase with his heavy walking-boots in one hand and his clothes over her arm, as though it were the most natural thing in the world. She did not think of herself in any way as an immoral woman, and her attitude towards other women had not been altered in the light of her own experience. She still regarded Nina Harding with disapproval as loose and over-sexed. Nor would her horror, if she had been told that Veronica had yielded to a lover without the preliminary of marriage, have been any less great to-day than it would have been a week ago. One of Morwenna's most settled convictions was that she was a good and pure woman; and she was certain that nothing that she could possibly do could ever be inconsistent with goodness and purity. She had given herself to George from the noblest and most idealistic motives, and for this reason she did not judge herself, or expect to be judged by others, by the same standards which might apply to ordinary women.

She deposited George's clothes on a chair by the side of the bed and put a hand on his shoulder to wake him. She had to shake him vigorously before he opened his eyes. "Dress quickly, dear, before Chiara comes," she said. "She mustn't

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find you in the house. You know how these Italians talk. It would be all over the place in about ten minutes . . .”

George did not appear to be in a specially amiable mood. “I’d better go and bathe, I suppose,” he said, in an irritated voice, yawning profoundly and stretching his great arms above his head. Morwenna, who was expecting at least a kiss and was half afraid lest he would not be satisfied with that, felt a sharp stab of pain at his indifference. Already she was beginning to learn her lessons. She waited till he was safely out of bed and then left him. “Do be as quick as you can, George, won’t you?” she said, with her hand on the door-latch. “You can come back at nine o’clock and I’ll give you some breakfast.” She smiled at him tenderly, and getting no response went down to the kitchen with a heavy heart.

George obeyed her instructions, and soon she heard the thud of his hobnailed boots on the stone staircase. He passed out of the house without speaking to her. They had made no plans for the future and she did not know what George intended to do. Pride had prevented her from asking him. Whatever he suggested she would agree to.

She told Chiara that she was expecting George to breakfast. She spoke in an off-hand way, with studied carelessness, and deluded herself into the belief that the sharp-eyed old woman suspected nothing. She did not know Italian servants.

It was with a sigh of sheer relief that at nine o’clock Morwenna, gazing from her bedroom win-

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dow, saw the tall figure of her lover stalking along the white, dusty highway. So little hold on him had she that for all she knew he might never have returned to her. Truly Giles Denham and all the other men who had sighed for her in vain were having their revenge!

George smiled at her abstractedly when he entered the house. His principal interest appeared to be in his breakfast. "Hullo!" he said. "It smells as if Chiara had surpassed herself. I *am* hungry!"

"It will be ready in a minute, dear," Morwenna replied. And in a few moments Chiara put her sinister brown face into the room and murmured the words: "Pronto, Signorina."

Where she had obtained all the food from Morwenna had not the least idea, but Chiara was evidently familiar with George's appetite. There was a dish of eggs, a dish of fried veal, succulent *Zucchine*, formagetta, bread, butter, fruit. The table was loaded and George's eyes sparkled at the sight. He sank quickly into his chair while Morwenna, with irritating slowness, filled his plate. When at last his enormous hunger was satisfied and he had lit an evil-smelling Italian cigar, he led the way into the garden—very much at ease in his inn—and lay back luxuriously in a deck-chair. Morwenna, who watched him as only an infatuated woman can watch the object of her passion, noted with joy that he seemed pleased and happy. When he looked at her there was tenderness in his eyes.

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"What are we going to do, my dear?" he asked.

"Leave San Bartolomeo as quickly as possible," Morwenna replied, with decision. "Can't we get away to-day? There's a train for Genoa about half-past two."

"I'm sick of Italy," George observed. "I am out of sympathy with the Latins and I detest their miserable *fascismo*. Let us go north, to Tyrol or to Bavaria."

"Anywhere you like, George," Morwenna replied, "provided we get out of here as quickly as possible. I met the landlord of this villa yesterday and he made it quite clear that the sooner I go the better he'll be pleased." She shuddered. "I don't know why it is, George, but I never want to see this place again and I couldn't be happy here, even with you."

"Then we'll start at once," said George. "We can sleep at Genoa to-night, and at Desenzano to-morrow night. Then we can take the *piroscafo* in the early morning to Riva. From there there's a little railway which joins the main line at Mori. If I remember rightly we go through the Dolomites, through Merano and Bolzano, to Innsbruck. From Innsbruck I believe there's an electrified line which climbs up into Ober Bayern. We can find some lovely place there, by the side of a lake. It's a beautiful country, Morwenna. The peaks of the mountains become rose-tinted when the sun sets, and their lower slopes have expanses of rich grass alternating with the woods, where dun-colored

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cows munch all day long in the sunshine and shake their melodious bells. And the people have a strange, inexhaustible vitality. They sing, they dance, and they paint huge ambitious pictures on the façades of their houses. They are admirable craftsmen—wood-carvers, violin-makers and so forth. You will find it an inspiring country, my dear.” He smiled at her, and it was a smile of rare sweetness which she had not often seen upon his face. When he stretched out his arms she went to him and sat on his knees and threw her arms round his neck and pressed her cheek against his in silent ecstasy.

Chapter xviii

THE journey, Morwenna had to admit it, was anything but pleasurable. George was an irritable traveling companion and her efforts to attend to his comfort lacked success, owing to her inexperience. She had never in her life before wanted to do anything for a man. She had always looked upon men as an inferior race, certain members of which, as a special privilege, she was accustomed to allow to run errands for her or to take her to theaters and restaurants. At thirty-two, with a considerable reputation—might she not even call it “fame”?—it was difficult for her to learn all the little graces and personal attentions which came so natural to girls like Veronica, who never pretended to have any other interest in life except the opposite sex. And in hotels and railway trains the transcendental George, the man with a message—the George who had captured her imagination and aroused her admiration and her love—the “cosmic” George, in fact, disappeared to make way for a rather selfish, middle-aged man whose nervous system was imperfectly under control. And at Genoa and again at Desenzano he had preferred to stay up late, fuddling himself with brandies and sodas, than to seek in her arms the consolation of her passionate love. She did not upbraid him for this, and allowed no trace of her

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inner suffering to be apparent. Her imagination had enabled her to construct an ideal George in which she still implicitly believed. If the George before her seemed to show signs of gluttony and selfishness and a tendency to excessive drinking, she put it down as the natural reaction of the ecstatic. The night they spent at Innsbruck compensated her for her pain and disappointment during the earlier part of their journey. George was plainly excited and pleased to be now within easy reach of his beloved Bavaria. He insisted that they must have a good dinner, and forced her to drink so much sparkling Moselle that she got ever so slightly drunk. He himself drank the best part of two bottles and followed up his wine with frequent brandies. The alcohol released from his hiding-place the ecstatic George. And George "in ecstasy," unlike the medieval saints, required a sympathetic human audience and found it to perfection in Morwenna. For hours he talked, pleasantly conscious that the woman whose love he had so easily awakened was listening, spell-bound. His subject was himself. It was one of his favorite topics. He told Morwenna about his childhood, his school days, his parents, his years in the navy, his awakening to cosmic consciousness, his married life. "My wife is a most delightful woman," he observed. "I often go to stay with her for a day or two, when I am in London, though of course our interests are totally different."

Morwenna suddenly shivered. She was in pain, mentally, but could not discover where or why.

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Of course she had known all along that there was a Lady Burnham in existence. But she had taken for granted that there had been a divorce, or if not a divorce a quarrel. Was it that some secret, unexpressed, deep-buried hope, lying at the bottom of her heart, had just received its death-blow? She put away from her the dire thought.

"What . . . happened, George?" she asked in her normal tone of more than friendly interest.

"We found that we had no more to give one another; that our union was hampering our development and had ceased to be a means of mutual growth," said George, sententiously. "And so we agreed to part, in order that we might remain the best of friends. The highest love must always be free and spontaneous, Morwenna. When it ceases to be that, it ceases to be love. It ceases to be that magical, stupendous force which unites the body and the soul and opens the doorway to the highest human possibilities."

"But surely one can't go on searching for and finding these perishable ecstasies. Such a life would bring one perilously near to promiscuity."

"Certainly not," said George indignantly. "The capacity to love varies with the individual. The finest men and the noblest women have always been the greatest lovers. Physical indulgence without love, the normal marriage bed in fact, is nothing but the most degraded animalism. The world is rotten with it, Morwenna."

But Morwenna, in the grip of passion though she was, was not going to surrender without a struggle.

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"Look here, George, don't tell *me!* I know lots of women who have been married for years and still receive their husbands' embraces with thankfulness and joy, and would be miserable without them. I believe they represent the majority. They are the people who never talk about sex because for one thing it presents no problem to them—there is nothing to discuss—and for another they hold that all that side of married life is a sacred thing between their husbands and themselves. . . ." The noise of the orchestra, which was playing a Viennese waltz of the most sugary and sentimental type, drowned the end of her sentence, but George had caught enough of it to be set going.

He called the waiter and ordered another brandy and soda and with his most prophetic air, with the patience and condescension of a master instructing a well-meaning but rather dense and foolish pupil, he preached and expounded. Morwenna tried as best she could to cling on to her small store of sense and wisdom. But it was no use. Just as a grown person will take a child's tightly clenched fist and force the tiny fingers to open and yield the trifle they were clutching with such an agonized sense of property, so George's eloquence overwhelmed Morwenna and forced her to let go the truths to which her intellect was vainly clinging. He talked of "planes" and of "spiritual values," while she became drugged and bemused. He found out all her weak spots—played upon her vanity and titillated her self-conceit. She was lulled by him into a delicious feeling of assurance that her action

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in yielding to George instead of being human, all too human, and indeed no more remarkable than the action of a housemaid yielding herself to the milkman, in short an obedience to impulse, was a definite proof of her nobility of character, of her other-worldliness and her spirituality. Inspired by his potations George surpassed himself in self-expression. With a thousand skillful touches, the result of years of practice, he represented himself to her ardent imagination as a kind of God, who endured existence on the earth in order that he might lead mankind to higher things. The more grotesque comparisons, which would have suggested to the most bemused brain that he was suffering from sheer megalomania—heading straight for the lunatic asylum—he was careful to avoid. He knew just how far it was safe to go. Made acutely sensitive by all the drink he had taken, he watched the effect of his words upon Morwenna as a doctor who has drugged a patient watches to see the effect of his injection. He interlarded his talk with a wealth of phrases taken from the little text books issued by various occult societies. He spoke of the pathway of initiation, of Raja Yoga, the liberation of the *cundellini* and the Swami Virikananda. He pointed out the errors of asceticism without, however, quite going so far as to underline the spiritual value of a quasi-religious debauchery. Christianity, the Aunt Sally of so many amateur mahatmas, came in for some shrewd blows, and he followed these up with a short lecture, which from the frequency of its delivery he now

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knew by heart, upon the religion of the ancient Greeks. He had read widely if not deeply, and Morwenna was startled and impressed by his display of learning. Wherever she was able to test him he was fully armed and his memory was amazing. Although she prided herself upon her complete emancipation from her mother's Victorianism both of religion and outlook, she nevertheless had still a large substratum of bourgeois respectability. She did not really believe in Christianity but she liked to go occasionally to church, preferably to a "high" church, and she listened with attention to the discourses of fashionable clerics. She also studied booklets about theosophy, dabbled in psycho-analysis and was much exercised in mind about the subconscious. But if, in the modern way, she was interested in all religions and a believer in none, she had at least one conviction to cling to, a conviction which Schopenhauer's "Essay on Woman," far from shattering, had strongly confirmed in her. This might be summed up as a conviction of the "importance of being a lady." Her rules of conduct, her system of ethics and all that was most stable in her character were epitomized in the word "lady," which meant that her fundamental attitude to life was that of the protected middle-class woman of about 1850, the period, roughly speaking, when the lady and gentleman parted company from the aristocrat. But all this in Morwenna was largely kept under the counter. In her shop windows she was accustomed, as befitted a brilliant novelist, to display all the

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latest intellectual goods. She could be as modern as anybody, as daringly speculative, as susceptible to new ideas. But what George was busy demolishing with the hefty blows of a stimulated house-breaker, was the one solid thing in Morwenna's make-up, her complacent acceptance of the importance of being a lady. George himself, for example, was so superbly "no gentleman." He made the "gentleman" ideal look simply silly when it was contrasted with his cosmic consciousness and his mission to liberate mankind from its shackles of convention and error.

The band had departed and the waiters were beginning to pile up the tables. It was nearly two o'clock and a weary, rather malevolent-looking waiter hovered near them clutching the bill face downwards on a white plate. George's blue eyes shone brightly. He was drunk not on brandy but on the eloquence which the brandy had liberated. He looked tenderly at Morwenna, and he felt that never before had he liked her so much or found her so desirable. Morwenna met his ardent glance and it seemed to her that her whole being was fused and melted in a white heat of passion and desire. "Let us go, dearest," she faltered. They rose and left the café and went up in the lift to their room. It was long before sleep claimed them.

Chapter xix

THE Hotel Post at Grünewald, once a resting place for travelers and pilgrims on their way to Rome, stands in the middle of the little town and looks across at a gabled seventeenth century house, with a brightly colored fresco of the Virgin and child seated upon a cloud painted upon its façade, in which the great Goethe once lodged when on his way to Italy. At the back of the hotel there is a pleasant garden in which the guests can drink their dunklesbier and gaze up at the peaks of the Karwandelgebirge growing rosy in the sunset. Everything about Grünewald delighted Morwenna. She loved the main street, filled with fat genial-looking Bavarians in green velvet knickers and embroidered braces who wore odd little hats with feathers sticking up at the back. In the evening the clean dun-colored cows, with their large mild eyes, would troop solemnly home from the pastures. Occasionally a small child with a tiny stick would toddle after them along the road and hurry them on. Every cow knew its own home, just like any other sensible person, and when it reached its front door it turned in and walked down its white-washed corridor to its nice clean bedroom. The goats were equally intelligent and well-behaved, and took their proper places in the households to which they belonged,

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along with the cows and geese and children. They were quiet, well-brought up, God-fearing goats: just as the cows were virtuous Catholic cows who did their duty in the sphere of life to which it had pleased God to call them. The strong, sparkling air was heady and invigorating. No wonder the people were always singing, dancing, eating, drinking or working! In the hotel the zither players thrummed and danced and sang until two in the morning. But at five o'clock the town was awake again, planks were being sawed, cows milked, floors scrubbed. Most of the townsfolk made violins in their spare time, and all delighted in painting the façades of their houses. Some houses only had brightly colored garlands of flowers painted on their walls, but many had more elaborate compositions—pictures of saints, pietà's crucifixions or pictorial visions of God, benevolent and bearded, presiding from a comfortable cloud over the saints in Heaven.

Grünwald lies in a fertile valley surrounded by high mountains, and on one side it is dominated by the great bare peak of the Wetterstein. The pastures on the lower slopes of the hills made patches of brilliant green which contrasted with the blueness of the sky. At the foot of the Wetterstein there was a lake of clear green water in a setting of beech trees and long grass. At one end of it was a primitive hütte, where food and beer were obtainable, adjoining a dilapidated bathing shed. Morwenna did not mind not having the latter to herself. She liked watching the funny,

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pot-bellied men lying in long rows in the sunshine, she liked still more the superb Bavarian Apollos who posed at the end of the diving board, brown-skinned and muscular, in all the pride of their health and beauty. And it was fun trying to talk in her bad high-school German to the women and the girls. Once, owing perhaps to the elegance of her *maillot*, combined with her dark hair and ivory skin, she was mistaken for a Frenchwoman, and she was conscious that the atmosphere which surrounded her was many degrees below zero. When it was discovered that she was English, all was well again.

For the first week George played to perfection the part of solicitous lover, and Morwenna, her senses lulled and soothed, gave herself to the happiness of being loved. The story which she had made for herself to account for her escapade grew more and more romantic as the days slipped by. She thought of George Sand, Mary Wollstonecraft and a dozen other great and noble women, most of them writers like herself, who had risen above conventional morality. In the clean, invigorating mountain air her physical health, always fairly good, became exuberant. Every day she and George went for long walks on the lower slopes of the mountains and bathed in the small green lake. George was often taciturn and rather moody but she did not mind. It was happiness enough merely to be with him, to have him by her side, tall and strong, her companion and yet beyond her grasp. Deep in her heart she wished that she could keep

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him by her side all the days of her life. She was instinctively a monogamous woman, and sometimes when she was unable to stifle her doubts and fears, she realized how completely she had given herself, given herself beyond recall, to a man who had never pretended that their union would be more than temporary. What would happen to her when he broke loose once again and continued free and unfettered, what she still regarded as his "mission"? Surely she would mean more to him than the others, —she, Morwenna Crowley, the so-long-pursued, the so-often-desired?

After seven days of almost perfect happiness there became apparent to Morwenna's heightened sensibilities the first indications in George of the restlessness she dreaded. George went off one morning for a long walk, by himself. "We both have our work to do," he said, before starting, "and I have been keeping you from yours. You'll be glad of a day to yourself. I have a great deal to think out before I go on to Berlin. I want to see Ernst Toller and to talk things over with him. He's just out of prison, you know. A wonderful man—quite the best of the German Communist writers. Perhaps there's some way in which I could be useful here. While I am walking I shall think it out." He kissed her on the forehead and strode off down the white, dusty road without looking back.

Morwenna looked wistfully at his retreating figure and then went back into her room and tried to write. There were a few business letters to be

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attended to first. Her agent had written to say that he had secured a commission for her to write six short stories for an American magazine at two hundred and fifty dollars apiece. Not bad: but, of course, the Michael Arlens and their like got ten times as much. They *would*, she reflected, complacently. She replied, accepting the offer. Then there was her biography for "Who's Who" to be brought up to date and a bundle of press cuttings to be glanced at. "Miss Morwenna Crowley, who has been spending the summer with her mother and sister in a charming villa on the shores of the Mediterranean, will have a new novel ready for publication in the Autumn. The title is 'Then and Now.' When I asked her to tell me its significance she only smiled enigmatically and replied, 'Wait and see!' Miss Crowley's novels always deal with serious problems affecting the lives of men and women, and her many readers will wait with impatience to discover what subject she has chosen to treat of in her new story." Morwenna grinned sardonically at the clipping, then crunched it up and threw it into her waste-paper basket. She was not such a fool as to disdain any kind of publicity, even the "personal par," but she could never understand how the people who wrote them could bring themselves to be such impudent liars.

When, her correspondence finished, Morwenna settled down to do some serious work, she found the effort required to concentrate upon the task which she had set herself was almost beyond her

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capacity. Was she losing her power of concentration altogether? She had seen this happen to other writers and knew well that it meant first the dilatory production of indifferent work and finally, from the literary point of view, complete extinction. She became afraid, and her fear only increased her restlessness. At last, in despair, she gave up altogether her attempt to write, and went out into the woods until it was time for her to eat her solitary luncheon. She had no idea when George was coming back from his walk, and to prevent herself from worrying about him she decided to go upon an expedition on her own account. There was a motor omnibus which plied at frequent intervals between the railway station of Grünewald and the lovely lake of Waldsee some fifteen miles away. She secured her place and, wedged in between two fat and jolly Bavarians, tourists from Munich, was driven on through woods and by the side of rushing rivers until the 'bus drew up at an hotel by the lakeside. The beauty of the place distracted her thoughts. The lake was surrounded by forests save at its far end where a line of mountains made a giant rampart. Pathways led in all directions through the woods. Skirting the lake she came at last to a tiny bay, the entrance to which was almost blocked by a wooded island. The distance to the island was not more than a hundred feet at the nearest point and the intervening stretch of water was quite shallow. She took off her shoes and stockings and began to wade and found to her delight that she could

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reach the island without difficulty. It was covered all over with beech trees save for a clearing in the middle where grass grew thickly. She was completely alone, and invisible both from the lake and from the shore. It was an enchanting spot and something childlike and adventurous in her nature, the possession of which was a secret deep-buried, responded to its appeal. She took her clothes off and let the sunlight warm her through. It was good to be alive, to have a lithe and sinuous body, to feel well! She stretched herself in the cool grass and lay with her head on her arm looking up at the green leaves of the trees. There was not a sound save that of the beating of her own heart, and the faint mysterious sounds made by the tiny creatures whose home she had invaded. Sometimes a small bird flew away with a whirr of wings. Occasionally a "plop" in the water near by indicated the leaping of a fish in the lake or the dive of a rat. In the deep green peacefulness around her, her mind forgot its troubles and was deeply at peace. She did not try to think, nor was she obsessed by thoughts, for there no thoughts could impose themselves upon her. She surrendered to that rarest delight of the senses, to a consciousness of her body in contact with the earth from which it sprang. She lay on the sun-warmed grass almost as an unborn child lies in its mother's womb, listening, feeling, breathing but devoid of thought. After a while she sank into a deep sleep from which she did not wake until the sun, moving towards the west, had ceased to shine upon her

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outstretched limbs. She woke with a sigh, followed by a start of apprehension lest her privacy might have been disturbed. But there was no sign or trace of any visitor. Her little island sanctuary was as inviolate as when she had first reached it. Morwenna rose and crept through the trees and undergrowth to the water's edge, wondering if she dare bathe. There were two or three rowing boats near the opposite shore of the lake, but their occupants were too far away to see her. She decided to risk it and slid almost without a sound into the cool clear water. It was a delight to her to feel that she was alone with the fishes, sharing their element with them, as much one of God's creatures as a porpoise or a whale or a sea lion. It was fun to get away from the silly swank of thinking oneself the feminine equivalent of a "lord of creation." Human beings, she felt, took their allotted place in the Divine scheme just like the woodlouse, the water-rat, the vulture and the dove, and they had little enough cause to get above themselves and give themselves airs. They were not more virtuous than pigeons or more beautiful than horses. The long swim made her feel hungry and she decided to dine by herself at the lakeside hotel before returning to Grünewald. In a vague, indefinite way she dreaded having to go back to Grünewald. She felt instinctively that suffering awaited her there. Had it been possible she would have stayed at Waldsee and let George seek her out if he wished to do so. When she got back, at half-past ten at night, to the Hotel Post at

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Grünewald, George had not returned. She sat in the hotel lounge until midnight listening to the zither players playing and singing sentimental Viennese waltz tunes and then went to bed. In the morning, when she went into her lover's room there was still no trace of him.

Chapter xx

GEORGE arrived, dusty but extremely cheerful, in time for luncheon. Morwenna, rather faint and sick at heart, greeted him with apparent unconcern and listened to his account of his adventures. "I got hopelessly lost," he said, describing his walk, "and had to go into Partenkirchen, of all dull spots, to get some dinner. There were several English people in the hotel. The English love Partenkirchen and Garmisch—I suppose it's the odor of sanctity shed by Oberammergau! I met rather an interesting woman there, a Mrs. Venables. Her husband is vicar of a country parish in Yorkshire, and I gathered they weren't very happy. I tried to straighten things out for her a bit. By the way, I asked her to come over here and see us."

"Us?" said Morwenna.

"Yes, my dear," George replied, with perfect unconcern. "I told her I was staying here with a great friend. You won't mind, surely?" Morwenna's dark eyes clouded for a moment, but she was not the woman to betray herself. "Oh, I don't mind," she retorted. "Why should I?" What she *did* mind, though she did not say so, was the almost boyish excitement and eagerness which George betrayed in talking about his new acquaintance. She thought of the days, not so

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many weeks ago, when she had been the cause of a similar excitement, a similar concentration of interest, and her heart became as lead in her bosom. Her sensitive vanity was wounded unendurably. But what else could she have expected? George had never pretended, or made promises, or given her to suppose that she meant more to him than the other women he had known. He had not seduced her by lies, rather by his brutal honesty, which had been like a challenge. She had taken up the challenge with her eyes open and in the contest had been badly thrown. Her charm, her wit, her fame, her physical appeal had not been powerful enough to keep him. She had staked everything, her all, and with the impassivity of a *croupier*, George had raked in his gains and was now preparing to start the game afresh. With a shock of horror she suddenly realized the humiliations which inevitably lay before her. Her vivid, highly trained imagination showed her the path of shame that she would have to tread. This Yorkshire parson's wife would be drawn like a magnet to Grünewald. She would be "always coming over," and George would go for long walks with her alone, and preach his gospel and concentrate her unsatisfied desires upon himself, and . . . Morwenna was no coward. Her pride and her courage flamed up and sustained her in her despair and shame. Whatever happened she, Morwenna Crowley, would bear the blows of Fate in silence, would lie in the bed which she had made without complaint.

"When is your new charmer going to pay her

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first visit, George?" Morwenna inquired in a tone of raillery. There was something in her voice, a note of mockery, which for a moment disconcerted him. "Well, she may come over to dinner to-night," he replied rather sheepishly. "She's rather dull at Partenkirchen and hasn't anybody much to talk to."

"Isn't her husband with her?" Morwenna inquired, with just a shade of the asperity which her mother would have shown in asking a similar question. "No. He's gone back to his parish. The truth is the two of them are not pulling together very well. They've been married about seven years."

"The danger zone," said Morwenna with a laugh.

"Yes, when the husband has a strongly developed possessive instinct," George agreed. "I imagine Venables, like most men of his profession, is ultra-Victorian in that respect."

"Why don't you make a pilgrimage to Yorkshire and conduct a religious mission to the misguided man, George? You might work amongst him with the most gratifying results. Then you would have the satisfaction—a rare one, for you, perhaps—of having restored a husband and wife to one another's bosoms." A suspicious reddening of George's neck told Morwenna that she had gone too far. There was very little humor in his composition; and he was incapable of seeing a joke against himself. He relapsed into an angry silence out of which all her conversational efforts could not

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rouse him. It was a new rôle for her to play, that of the submissive mistress trying to woo her lover back into a good temper. She did her best, but she was painfully conscious that the harder she tried the more irritating she became. At last she gave up the attempt.

After luncheon George expressed his intention of going for a walk and did not invite Morwenna to accompany him. She knew precisely what he intended to do. There was a train which arrived from Partenkirchen at about four in the afternoon. From it Mrs. Venables would descend and George would be on the platform to meet her. They would amuse themselves until dinner time and then appear together in the lounge of the hotel. George would expect her to be gracious, to make conversation, in short to make the *dîner à trois* a success!

Rage and despair filled her heart. She went upstairs to her room and flung herself upon her bed. She could not cry, she could scarcely think—her misery was stupefying. George, of course, would have a perfect explanation for everything, a perfect justification. No doubt he fancied that he was doing good. No missionary or religious revivalist could possibly be more convinced that he was unselfishly helping others than George. "Helpfulness" was a positive mania with him, she bitterly reflected. But hadn't he any social common sense? How could he bring himself to ruin her good name and reputation as he proposed to do? After all, she wasn't just anybody. And she knew that there was no class of people whose

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names come much before the public who were more maliciously gossiped about than writers. Miss Smith and Miss Brown might do daring things with impunity. Nobody would discuss their affairs outside their immediate circle, because nobody would be interested. But if *her* name were mentioned in any London drawing-room, at once people would prick up their ears. London, as Morwenna well knew, is full of nonentities who seek to attract attention by defaming more or less well-known people whom they have scarcely met. And now she was to be delivered over to the tender mercies of a Mrs. Venables! She writhed at the prospect of being humiliated before this casual acquaintance of George's. Jealousy overwhelmed her. She buried her hot cheeks in her pillow and her hands clenched convulsively. What had she done that God should send her this punishment? She had made mistakes, like every one else. But she had always been a pure woman, she had never lowered her standards. She had given herself to George out of love and sympathy and compassion and faith. She had dared everything for his sake, shown every quality of courage and generosity of which she believed herself capable. Why could he not value her gift? How could it possibly mean so little to him!

She got up and walked drearily round her room. The hair brushes, powder puffs and cream pots on her dressing table had a queer new significance because George had handled them and commented on them. After all he was a very human lover.

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In his tender or passionate moments there was little of the mystic and the dreamer about him. He had liked her pretty clothes and she had delighted in making herself attractive for him. She had let herself go. There had been no reserves in her love—she had allowed him every privilege and every pleasure that he could take of her. And all the time, instead of feeling any gratitude he had behaved *au fond* like an Eastern Sultan, and made a favor of accepting her devotion. Morwenna was an instinctive and fanatical feminist and blind anger filled her heart when she realized, too late, how she had been led into betraying the Cause. That she, of all women, should have been lured into playing this submissive, this slavish feminine rôle! The utter degradation of it! She began calmly and dispassionately to consider whether it had not become necessary for her to take her life. Her pride had received a wound so deadly that continued existence seemed to her impossible. And then she thought of the reaction which her death by her own hand would have upon George. Would he understand her motives, or would he ascribe her deed to mere hysterical revenge? If she killed herself would he merely liken her to a servant girl who drowns herself when the chauffeur who has “got her into trouble” proves faithless? She could not bear that prospect. But how explain things to him? She could not tell him: pride forbade. She could not write to him beforehand, or leave behind her a letter addressed to him, because it would get into the hands of the police and

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cause him worry and annoyance. And Heaven knew she had no wish to hurt the poor dear! He couldn't help his own nature. Besides, there *was* something about George, something fine. . . . No. Even the luxury of death was denied her. There was her work and that, after all, was the main thing in life. She opened the communicating door and went for the last time into George's bedroom. How untidy the creature was! Clothes were thrown about the room anyhow. She looked at his shaving tackle and pulled from its case one of his big razors in its cream-colored ivory handle and opened the shining blade. How like George it was not to use a safety razor! Then she took from the floor a pair of his heavy brown leather walking boots and felt their enormous weight. Fancy being able to wear such things on one's feet! There was something so overpoweringly masculine about them that it went to her head and made her shiver and she put them down hastily. She hardly dared to look at the bed, at the broad pillow on which her own dark head had lain so often and so happily. She knew that she was turning deliberately the knife in the wound by coming into George's room. She could not understand what obscure masochistic instinct was making her do it. Perhaps by looking her unhappiness fair and square between the eyes, without flinching, she would find within herself the strength to conquer and overcome it. And the thought that now she knew and was prepared for the worst did give her strength. She had put upon her store of courage the last strain. "Will it stand

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the test?" she dismally asked herself. Yes, yes, yes—of course it would! She found herself laughing, not from hysteria but from sheer relief, just as a soldier who has been frightened to death of being afraid laughs to find that after all he can quit himself worthily.

She went back into her own bedroom and locked the door which separated it from George's room. Then, with extreme elaboration and care, she powdered herself and made up her face. When she was certain that she looked her best she went down into the lounge of the hotel, and ordered tea. The three zither players, dressed in green embroidered knickerbockers, white shirts and elaborately embroidered braces, were playing a languorous Viennese waltz. Smiles wreathed their good, simple faces, and the most beautiful of the three—a tall blond young man, perfectly proportioned and glowing with health—fixed his eye upon her, as she sank into her wicker armchair, and beamed amorously. Morwenna, perhaps for the first time in her life, experienced a thrill of pure animal desire which she was forced to recognize for what it was. She was disquieted by it, but at the same time she felt that she had learnt a secret. Queer that she had been creating imaginary men and women all these years, and never really known . . . She began to think about her books, but as she looked back upon them she was pleased to find, in view of her present knowledge, how often she had *guessed* right. Perhaps actual experience was not so necessary to novelists after all? There was, however, a

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fine distinction to be drawn between experience and the *pursuit of experience*. She was rather pleased to know that she had been acute enough to draw it.

"Madame has, I think, dropped her handkerchief." Morwenna started and looked up into a pair of amused brown eyes which gleamed down at her under shaggy eyebrows. She was conscious of a mane of dark brown hair, a brown pointed beard, two rows of glittering teeth and a pair of lips that were indecently red. The creature stood bowing and smiling like a stage Frenchman, completely at his ease, respectful, admiring. He held a tiny square of orange-colored silk in one hand, and offered it to her with a bow.

Morwenna accepted her handkerchief with a smile of thanks which the stranger, with easy assurance, interpreted as an encouragement. He sat down in the vacant armchair next to her own and began to talk as if he had known her all his life. After all, why not? He was, to use the phrase so often in Morwenna's mind, "obviously a gentleman." In her present mood, she was unusually susceptible to masculine flattery, and that the man was an adept in making himself pleasing to women was quickly evident. With a complete lack of that "reticence"—really to a large extent self-consciousness—on which English people pride themselves, he began to talk about himself. He was an Austrian, a Viennese, and a painter. His name was Paul Breitkopf. Morwenna had heard it, indeed she had seen one of his portraits

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in London, and told him so. He beamed. He had been struck by the beauty of Madame's profile the moment she had arrived at the hotel. Judge then of his surprise and pleasure—oh, but he must be forgiven for his curiosity, yes, yes—when he discovered from the *portier* that the owner of the so lovely profile was no other than Miss Morwenna Crowley, the novelist. Actually he had in his valise a copy of "With Unrelenting Pace" in the Tauchnitz edition. He had read it with the utmost appreciation—such breadth of mind, such understanding of the human heart! Morwenna was pleasantly thrilled, as all writers are thrilled to find themselves known and appreciated. In her bitter necessity and distress of mind she could not help turning the gallant Austrian to account. His presence at dinner would enable her to carry off a situation otherwise impossibly humiliating. "Won't you dine at our table to-night?" she asked, when they had been talking together for some time. "A friend of Sir George's, a Mrs. Venables, is, I think, coming over from Partenkirchen. So that if you can join us we shall make a *partie carrée*." Breitkopf's pleasure was obviously genuine. "It is good of you to take pity on my loneliness," he said. "Somehow, I cannot make friends with these excellent Prussian tourists. The women have much virtue but no charm and as for the men they are—how shall I say?—a little serious, a little heavy. They are admirable people in their way but unlike our Viennese. Unlike also the Bavarians."

Cuckoo

"Aren't these people Bavarians, then?" Morwenna asked, in surprise, looking round the crowded room. "For the most part, no. There are a few families from München, but nearly all are holidaymakers from Berlin. Real Huns, as you call them," he added, laughing. Morwenna made a gesture of protest. "We really aren't as stupid as all that," she said. "After all, the war has been over for nearly seven years. Only in one or two of our yellowest newspapers, and by some of our bloodthirsty old men who never saw anything of the actual fighting, are these vulgarisms retained. We all want to forget the war, and all the futile hatreds and lies which it let loose. Many of us would rather not think about the peace." Morwenna, prettily, put out her hand and smiled. "Art, at least," she said, "must always be international."

Breitkopf suggested a walk to the lake before dinner, and Morwenna went upstairs to put on her hat. She was surprised at herself, half shocked at the way in which, with Breitkopf's help, she was bearing up. That it was possible for a woman of her age to alter so completely in such a short time struck her as almost miraculous. She began to understand, as she looked back over the last few crowded weeks to the Morwenna of San Bartolomeo, the Morwenna who had played fast and loose with poor Giles Denham's affections, why so many of her women friends, as soon as they married, seemed to drop away from her, to slip out of her reach. One certainly did change when one

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ceased to be a maid: a loss and a gain; childish things, lovely illusions put away forever, and in their place pleasures and pains before undreamt of. . . .

They went up the familiar winding path through the woods which she and George had so often trodden together. Often they had to climb the hillside in order to let the homing cattle plod down the narrow track. The mellow sound of the cow bells came to them continuously through the stillness of the wood, sometimes far off, sometimes near at hand. Morwenna loved the cows, they were so plump, so melancholy-eyed, so respectable and virtuous and well-behaved! The shores of the lake were thronged with sun-bathers lying half-naked on the grass, and all the seats outside the hütte were filled with placid holidaymakers drinking brown foaming beer out of mugs. Far above the clear green water towered the great peak of the Wetterstein, emerging hard, sharp and rocky from its sheath of woods. "Why did we not think to bring our clothes so that we might bathe," said Paul, echoing Morwenna's thoughts. They sat down on a grassy knoll and gazed at the tranquil water at their feet. All around them was the magic stillness of the summer evening, broken only by the sound of the cow-bells or by an occasional burst of song coming from the hütte. "One must be happy," said Paul suddenly. "One is not so important that one dares not to be happy. Look, my friend. Look at that bare peak standing up in illimitable bright air, stretching towards Heaven!

Cuckoo

Surely most of our miseries are due to our own conceit. We come and go, love and work, endure and strive and think that our little pains and pleasures are what move the world, when in truth they matter very little. Outside us is perfect and enduring beauty and the laughter of the spheres. The things we make are nothing but children's toys compared with the things we see around us if we care to look. Perhaps when the man takes the woman under the sunlight or under the light of the stars, instinctively, like the pure and virtuous animals, led only by desire uncomplicated by thought, perhaps, dear friend, that is the most beautiful action that is possible to human beings. It is the most natural, it is that which is most surely in tune with the vast creative scheme of which we form so small a part. Our art, our civilization, what is it but a deliberate, and cerebral complication of something which is noblest when it is most simple, and purest when it is most instinctive?"

"But that is sheer lust," said Morwenna. "You wouldn't attempt to glorify lust?"

"On the contrary. Lust needs no glorification. It is life. To-day we in Northern Europe have become a deficient people. The war has devitalized us all, the *intelligenza* especially. We are decaying through our lack of lust and we are using our brains in desperation, to whip up the little that we have. Our literatures show it. You must not despise what God has planted in us for His own purposes, any more than you must despise this

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vivid grass, the lake beneath us, or that mountain that towers, like a giant phallus, into the sky."

"Oh, this nature cult!" cried Morwenna, impatiently. "Must I turn my body then into a breeding machine, in order to be in tune with the infinite?"

Paul laughed. "I could not continue my arguments," said he, "without, perhaps, shocking. *Tout de même*, you should certainly experience motherhood. You are not complete without it. One of your writers, I see, has preached very sensibly the doctrine of infanticide. But I fear that neither your country nor mine is ready for that. That *sacré* St. Paul! His dismal shames have infected England, like a mental disease, more's the pity. Alas, as for me, I do not care for Christianity: it has destroyed religion. And man cannot live without religion. Consider the so-called Pagans. How loyally and well they worshiped their gods and goddesses. What devotion, what faith!"

"You ought to talk to Sir George Burnham on these topics," said Morwenna, with rather a bitter laugh. "I expect he would agree, to a great extent, with your point of view. Perhaps, if you don't mind, we had better walk back to the hotel to see if he is there."

Breitkopf jumped to his feet and gallantly offered her his hand. "You must forgive me if my tongue runs away with me," he said, with his charming smile. "I have—how do you express it?—a bee in my bonnet, eh?"

Cuckoo

"We all have," said Morwenna. "I carry about a whole apiary. They give me no peace."

They encountered George and Mrs. Venables in the main street of the village, just outside the house that had been honored by Goethe. For a fleeting instant Morwenna thought that she would faint. But the moment of weakness passed quickly, and by the time George had caught sight of her she was entirely herself. Mrs. Venables was a thin woman of about five-and-thirty, with a sharp nose, mouse-colored hair and a pair of gray eyes made solemn by her self-absorption. She was rather well-dressed and excellently shod, and her manners had a "county" flavor that seemed slightly incongruous. She clipped her "g's" and talked in gusts. To Morwenna's sharp eyes she appeared at once as the kind of woman who specializes in "spiritual difficulties." She knew the type. Sometimes they persecuted gynecologists and paid guinea after guinea to talk about themselves. The psychoanalysts batted on them. Clergymen who encountered them had no alternatives save flight or matrimony. Mr. Venables had evidently succumbed to the temptation to be "helpful." Now George, by reason of his childish vanity, would follow suit! Morwenna, while these thoughts were flying through her brain, had put on her most charming smile and her most agreeable social manner. She greeted Mrs. Venables with a bright but glacial cordiality and introduced Paul Breitkopf, who bowed with a subtly derisive politeness. It amused Morwenna to watch George's face as the

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two men shook hands. George's frown, his angular stiffness, were ludicrously like those of the conventional possessive husband. What a sultan the creature was, guarding his harem!

As it was nearly dinner-time, Morwenna carried off Mrs. Venables to powder her nose. The two women chatted rapidly and artificially to one another while they carried on their mutual investigations. Morwenna was rather relieved to find that Mrs. Venables had no idea of the nature of her relations with George. It made things easier.

The dinner, from Morwenna's point of view, was a complete success. She and the fascinating Breilkopf dominated the conversation, and Mrs. Venables was so much occupied in keeping her end up that she had no time to devote to George, who was relegated to the position of intermediary between his guests and the waiter. Except in tête-à-tête conversations, for which he had a perfected technique, George did not shine socially. His style was too heavy for the dinner-table. The intervention of Breilkopf had the effect of relegating him to the position which he had unconsciously designed for Morwenna.

When the meal was over they found a table in the lounge and sat drinking their coffee and liqueurs to the music of the indefatigable zither players. Morwenna maneuvered the positions so that George and Mrs. Venables were together on one side of the table and she and Breilkopf on the other. She felt cruel and exultant, enjoying her lover's discomfiture. Once, while Paul was talking

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to her enthusiastically about a picture in the Alteren Pinakothek at München—Goya's astonishing portrait of Maria Luisa of Spain—he laid his hand lightly upon her knee. The brief caress gave her a queer satisfaction. A word, a glance and she could have this accomplished and attractive man at her feet. She drank this knowledge like a glass of wine and was refreshed by it. Considerably before the time when it was necessary to go to the station George rose and said that Mrs. Venables must not miss her train. For a second Morwenna debated whether she should make a fool of him either by pointing out that it was not necessary for Mrs. Venables to stir for at least half an hour, or by suggesting that she and Paul should accompany them. It was a glance of supplication from Paul which decided her. She let George have his way. How clumsily, she could not help feeling, he had managed things!

When they were alone Paul suggested a stroll under the stars, and Morwenna followed him into the deserted gardens without a word.

"How long are you staying here, Miss Crowley?" Paul asked. He put his hand lightly on her arm.

"I am going back to England to-morrow," she replied.

"So soon?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry. We might have been friends."

"To-day, perhaps without knowing it, you have been my friend."

Cuckoo

"Shall I see you again, dear Engländerin?"

"Who knows?"

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes," said Morwenna. "I should like it. If you come to London you must come to see me."

"Alas!" He spread out his hands. "That is not so easy for us Austrians. . . . This has been an enchanting evening," he added. "I could wish that it were not to be the last that we shall spend together. You will come perhaps to Vienna?"

"Perhaps. But now I must say good-night to you and go to my room and pack." They stood looking at one another in the dim half-light, without speaking. Then Paul held her hand in his. "Yes," she said. "Please kiss me." He took her in his arms for a moment and then turned away with a sigh, while she walked slowly back to the hotel.

Chapter xxi

MORWENNA, when she found herself alone in her bedroom, experienced a revulsion of feeling. Why had she cheapened herself with this Austrian, whom she did not know, when all her heart—still—was given to George? It was a weak and foolish act. Ah, that she could make amends for it in George's arms! But that, she knew, must not happen. At all costs she must remain firm, keep control of herself. To yield again to George would only mean that she would be humiliated more deeply in the future. She must make the break herself, at her chosen moment, and now was the time to do it.

She got dejectedly into bed and tried in vain to sleep. After what seemed an eternity she heard George's heavy footstep in the passage. He entered his room and she listened while he undressed and cleaned his teeth. Then she heard her name called, and simultaneously the handle of the communicating door was turned. In the dark stillness she could hear his labored breath and the thumping of her own heart. Again he tried the door, and again he called her name. She clenched her fists under the bedclothes and held her breath. The temptation to appeal to him to give up philandering and to settle down with her, anywhere, and upon any terms, was almost over-

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powering. But her pride held firm, her pride and her common sense. If she made a scene she knew that in all probability she would be successful, for the moment—but only for the moment. And she could not buy a respite of a month or two at so dear a cost to her self-esteem. She buried her face in her pillow and held her breath until at last she heard him move away from the door and get into bed. . . .

A little while later—how short a while it seemed!—she heard the sound of his regular breathing. He had fallen asleep as easily as a child. It was already daylight before she herself, exhausted with emotion and with thought, sank into a troubled and uneasy slumber. When she woke it was past their usual breakfast time. From the silence in the next room Morwenna concluded that George had risen at his usual hour and had gone downstairs to eat his usual hearty breakfast. She rang for her coffee, asked for a time-table, and proceeded to complete her packing. She felt tired and listless and utterly unable to cope with any scene. But George had to be faced. She could not leave him without a word. The train for Munich went at 12.20 and it was now after eleven. She went down to the office, paid her bill, gave instructions about her luggage being taken to the station, and proceeded to look for her lover. He was not to be found. He was not in the garden, neither was he in the lounge, nor in the writing-room. She went out of the hotel into the sunlit streets of the little town and visited the cigar shop and the post-office

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and the bank, but he was nowhere to be seen. When she inquired of the porter, all that he knew was that "Sir Burnham" had gone out about half an hour ago. She felt utterly miserable, nervous and unsure of herself. Was she behaving sensibly or merely like an insanely jealous fool? Was she right in supposing that George was growing tired of her, and that there was anything "in" his friendship with Mrs. Venables? Or was she letting her imagination run away with her, without cause? After all, George had always been scrupulously honest. He had, at least, never attempted to deceive her about anything. What right had she, at the first test, to assume the worst about him? Wasn't she perhaps failing him, unjustly and ungenerously? She was on the point of tears. She sat down stiffly on one of the armchairs in the lounge, with her dumpy umbrella clasped in one hand, her handbag on her lap, her light coat over one arm, and stared straight in front of her at the inexorable hands of the clock. George, George, George! Why didn't he come and *do* something, *say* something! It was intolerable. . . . Suddenly Breitkopf stood in front of her. His eyes had lost their mockery and for one naturally so imperturbable he looked curiously ill at ease.

"You are going at once?" he asked.

She swallowed. "By the 12.20. In fact in about ten minutes." She spoke with difficulty, and he could see that she was on the verge of collapse.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked.

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"You haven't seen Sir George Burnham anywhere, I suppose?"

"I saw him at breakfast," he replied. "And I saw him leave the hotel afterwards. He said he was going for a long walk. But in what direction I cannot say." Breitkopf shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. "But surely he will return if he knows that you are going by the 12.20!"

"He doesn't know," Morwenna faltered. Then her overwrought nerves gave way and she began to sob helplessly. "Oh, I don't know what to do," she groaned. "I don't know what to do . . . !"

"Little fool!" rapped Breitkopf. "Stop it at once or I box the ears!" He spoke with a harsh contempt, as one who assumes instant, unfaltering obedience. "Shameless little baby-cry!" he sneered. Morwenna's lamentations were cut off short. She leapt to her feet, her eyes flashing, drew herself up to her full height and stared, with heaving breast, at the man who thus insulted her. "How dare you. . . ."

"*Dear Engländerin!*" Breitkopf replied, with an irresistible smile. "Forgive my harsh measures! You are so proud that you would forever afterwards be ashamed of yourself if you gave way before me, almost a stranger to you, who cannot even dare at present to call himself your friend. And there are other people in the room. It is public. They would notice, and they would talk. . . ."

Morwenna sank back into her chair, breathless but no longer tearful. "Thank you," she said.

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"Now I must write a letter. It will only take me a minute or two. Then, perhaps, if you have nothing else to do, you will see me to my train?"

He bowed gravely.

Morwenna, her self-control now completely restored, went up to the writing-room and wrote a note for George. It could hardly have been shorter.

"Good-by, my dear," the letter ran. "I think it is best that I should go now. I have been very happy and I regret nothing. God bless you and keep you.

"MORWENNA."

She sealed up the envelope, addressed it to Sir George Burnham, and gave it to the porter to hand to him on his return. Then she went back to where she had left Paul. "Let us start," she said. "It will be pleasanter not to drive. They will send all my things along to the station and put them in the carriage for me."

Together they walked down the dark and cool stone-paved hall of the old posting inn, into the torrid sunshine of the street. How gay the place looked, and the happy smiling people! A few days ago and she had been happier than any of them. The little shops, full of painted wooden toys and knick-knacks and bright colored shawls, beamed at her invitingly, for the last time. As they turned away from the village into the long unshaded road that led down to the station two peasant children passed them, a boy and girl. They

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looked shyly at Morwenna, smiled at her and uttered the kindly greeting: "Grüss Gott."

"Why are Catholic countries so much nicer to live in than any others?" Morwenna asked of her companion. "I think," said Paul, "because the Catholic religion is so full of courtesy and grace. You see the Protestants, to my mind, are a little lacking in chivalry. They have a God but not a Goddess. Our Lady, besides being a perfect wife and mother, is also a sympathetic and charming woman. She encourages all the simple, pleasant and kindly things in life. And although, of course, she has to be a little stern at times, particularly over the lapses of her erring daughters, all the same, she understands. She, too, is a woman. And, mind you, she is not at all too proud to accept a compliment from a member of the opposite sex. Oh, no! She will bow most graciously, from Heaven, to all male sinners who have the good manners to light a little candle before her image. Yes, the Catholic faith is a religion which does not insist too much upon the impossible. It is content to grow a few *foretti* upon our poor human clay, and on the whole it grows them very nicely. It has its darker side, of course. Taken seriously, it is a danger. But here . . ." Paul shrugged his shoulders expressively, and marched on, sticking up his pointed beard. Morwenna, not for the first time, felt a little afraid of him, and she was rather relieved that they were not going to see much more of one another. He belonged to a type of which she had

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read in French novels and of which she had caught a fleeting glimpse in the pages of Schnitzler. But she had not actually met a man of his sort, in the flesh, before. That scene in the lounge of the Hotel Post had been, well, upsetting, to say the least. She did not care to be understood quite so well as that. They had arrived now at the station, a modern rough-cast building designed in excellent taste—clean, airy, well arranged and with a spacious beer-garden attached to it. When Morwenna had taken her ticket she and Paul sat down at a white table, overhung by a crimson Rambler in full bloom. "My friend," said Morwenna, "I have more to be grateful to you for than you are ever likely to know. Don't be frightened. I am not going to embarrass you with confidences. But I should like to say 'thank you.' " Paul bowed and murmured that the gratitude should be all on his side.

"I needn't ask you how you come to understand my sex so well," she observed, smiling. "I should put it down to a natural gift developed by, well, exceptional experience!"

"Perhaps," said Paul, who felt flattered, "one understands best the things in life in which one is most interested. Like La Tosca I can say with truth that I have lived for art and love. All else in my life is subordinate to that."

"And when you cultivate women," said Morwenna, with twinkling eyes, "I suppose you have only one end in view?" Paul laughed at her. "That is unfair. I am grateful to all women, first

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because a woman's body gave me birth and secondly because in women I have always found my greatest happiness. I therefore cultivate many women whom it is impossible for me to enjoy, out of a sense of gratitude to the sex as a whole. As for the individual women whom I meet and who arouse my admiration and desire"—he stretched out his hands, expressively—"why, if one falls in love, surely one hopes to be successful, to arouse a reciprocal affection and by one's finesse as a lover to give as much pleasure as one receives? Would you have it otherwise?"

"Yes," said Morwenna. "Personally I should hope to find in my lover a reasonably faithful husband."

"Ah, that is the English system," Paul retorted. "And, forgive me, please, your English newspapers are always full of its—results. Marriage and passion—no, they do not go well together. Affection, toleration, money and a certain diplomatic blindness, those, believe me, are qualities both of the perfect husband and of the perfect wife."

"You Central Europeans are so practical," said Morwenna. "You must have a system that works. We islanders are more idealistic. We aim higher and most of us fail to achieve what we aim at, but many do really succeed. People who marry for love when they are young and remain faithful are, I think, the happiest in all the world."

The train, drawn by its powerful electric engine, slid into the station and Morwenna, followed by

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Paul carrying an armful of books and magazines and by the porter with her bags, joined the throng upon the platform. Paul, with the adroitness with which he carried out all the smaller actions of life, secured her a corner seat in a second class carriage. While the porter was putting her suit cases on the rack he disappeared for an instant, returning in time to produce the porter's tip. In his hand he held a beautiful bouquet of red roses.

"Will the dear Engländerin accept these flowers," he said, "in memory of our all too brief friendship?"

Morwenna felt absurdly touched. Her eyes were suspiciously bright as she accepted them and gave her hand to be kissed. "Thank you, dear friend," she said. "You are very good to me. It is perhaps as well that we are parting." She sighed and smiled as the train began to move along the platform. "All the same!" She put her head out of the open window and her eyes held his for a moment as she smiled good-by. What he saw there made him blow her a kiss and very prettily she waved one back to him in return. She had no illusions about Paul. But what a relief it was to come across a man one could understand. "He liked and admired me and he wanted to sleep with me," she reflected, "and that was just that. Dear Paul. What a relief!"

At Munich Morwenna stopped a couple of days to write an impressionistic travel sketch about the Bavarian Highlands for *The Fortnightly Review*. The delay gave her time also to write to her

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secretary, Miss Marlow, instructing that young woman to join her as soon as possible at Annecy. The novel which she had begun at San Bartolomeo simply *must* be finished by the first of September. A frenzied hunger for work swept over her. She felt as if she wanted to dictate day and night, continuously, until she dropped from sheer exhaustion.

Part iii



Chapter xxii

“**T**HE White Cottage, Billbury, Bucks!” said Bill Hepburn meditatively. “Who would have thought of it, Giles, a year ago!”

He was lying flat on his back upon a number of cushions, gazing up into the sky. It was Sunday, it was hot. The time was that pleasant interval between luncheon and tea.

“It is a bit odd, when you come to think of it,” Giles agreed, from the depths of his deck chair. “What do they know of England, etc.! Finding this place is the biggest stroke of luck that ever happened to me. I get fonder of it every day. Come and watch the flowers growing!” He got up and walked across to Bill’s recumbent form and pulled him to his feet. The White Cottage was one of those comfortable country villas erected at the beginning of the nineteenth century for people of leisure. It was built of stone, and had tall solemn windows and a slate roof with overhanging eaves. It lay back from the road about a hundred yards, and a monkey tree, suggestive of a country vicarage, rose in the middle of its front lawn. The house stood surrounded by a large garden, which had been lovingly cared for by the successive generations of simple folk who had made

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the place their home. Behind the house was a smooth lawn with a circular pond in the midst of it, filled with water lilies and stocked with frogs and newts and tiddlers. On the right there was a rose garden, on the left a large coach house converted into a garage, and a stable yard with outhouses. One of these still had the unmistakable, unforgettable smell of the harness-room, though it was long since any harness had been cleaned and polished within it. Beyond the principal lawn, hidden by a tall shrubbery, was a kitchen garden and beyond that a small orchard. There were perhaps two and a half acres of land in all. Giles had bought the freehold, and although he was not a man in whom the instinct for property was at all strongly developed, it gave him an unmistakable thrill of pride to feel that he owned one small corner of his native land. The stabling gave him particular pleasure.

"It reminds me of the place we lived in when I was a kid," he remarked while he and Bill were strolling round the "estate." "I was born in Herefordshire, just the other side of the Malvern Hills, in a house about this size. I can remember as clearly as anything seeing my father come back after a day's hunting, on Birdie, when I was about four years old. I used to spend most of my day hanging about the stable-yard, talking to the groom. Once my mother saw me hanging on to Birdie's tail and nearly fainted with fright. Birdie was a vicious brute and a noted kicker, but apparently she turned her great, long head in my

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direction and saw that it was only a kid she had to deal with, and refrained from landing out. She was very old, poor dear. She was put out to grass a few years later, and we used to go and take her lumps of sugar every morning after breakfast. We wept in floods when she had to be shot. I love the smell of harness rooms, don't you, Bill? It reminds me of the days when I used to bring my boots to be dubbed, when I was going out with the beagles. Queer how all those things drop away from one. I wouldn't willingly kill a bird or a beast, or hunt a hare or a fox, nowadays, for anything in the world."

"You ought to be a vegetarian, then," said Bill, callously.

"Oh, yes, I know," Giles retorted, "but don't for Heaven's sake expect me to be logical. Who is? What would happen to the Church if it started preaching Christianity? Can't be done. One has to acquiesce; but one can cultivate a little private garden of one's own opinions at the same time!"

While they were strolling desultorily round the garden, looking at the larkspurs and the lupins, the foxgloves and the reprieved geraniums—reprieved owing to the gardener's entreaties—they heard the noise of a car driving up to the front door.

"That sounds like Nina and the children," cried Bill, taking a flying leap over an herbaceous border and rushing round to the front of the house. Giles followed at a more leisurely pace.

"Lots of us have come!" said Nina, climbing

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out of her four-seater. "And as it's Sunday and we weren't expected we've brought a chicken."

"It's a hen," corrected Roderick, aged nine. "A big hen, Giles."

"'Ush, ducky," said Nina, "the gennleman will 'ear you . . . And if Mrs. Mustard is taking a Sunday off I'll cook it for you myself."

Mrs. Mustard, Giles' housekeeper, an immense woman with coal black hair and beady black eyes, who was dressed in a black and white striped bodice and a voluminous black alpaca skirt, and wore elastic-sided boots, made her appearance at this moment at the front door, and stood at ease with her palms resting on her enormous thighs.

"Well, I never," she said. "How many more of you are there? Miss Veronica and you, Mrs. 'Arding, and that divil Roddy, that's three." "And me," screamed Anne. "Me's here, too."

"You betcherlife, my pretty," said Mrs. Mustard. (She had a nephew on the Music Hall stage and enjoyed borrowing his expressions.) "Well that makes six in all, if nobody don't drop in. I think we could do with that there chicken of yours, Mrs. 'Arding. I've got a bit of bacon to put round it. Ready at a quarter to eight sharp, and it's four o'clock now. You can 'ave your tea in about 'arf an hour. That do?"

"Lovely!" said Nina. "Sorry we're giving you so much extra trouble."

"You go along, it ain't no trouble at all," said Mrs. Mustard, retreating into the house with the chicken in her arms. To Giles, the daily func-

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tioning of Mrs. Mustard seemed almost too good to be true. The fact that he paid her high wages and that *l'anse du panier* was invariably of generous proportions scarcely mitigated his gratitude. She was a monumental woman, a tower of strength! She knew "what was what," whereas Giles himself, although he was now forty-one years old, had never once come within a mile of discovering what what really was.

The party, headed by Anne and Roderick, who proceeded with leaps and rushes, uttering loud whoops, walked round the house to the lawn at the back. The elders disposed themselves on cushions and deck-chairs while the children ran at once to the lily pond and hastily began hunting for frogs.

"I wanted to bring Hugo and Tilda Wigs-worth and the other two kids," said Nina, "but Hugo had a case and Tilda has tooth-ache and there wasn't room in the car. Also, though you mayn't believe it, I had pity on you."

"What rot," said Giles. "I've tons of room. The more the merrier, my dear!"

"I've come for a week," said Veronica. "Wif my little tooth-brush! Do you think Mrs. Mustard will think me really pure, Giles? I'd hate her to think me a forward minx or hussy, as the case might be."

"Morwenna came to dine the other night, Giles," Nina remarked. "We all loved her. She seemed quite different and positively human. She fell for

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Anne completely, and didn't *really* seem to disapprove of me."

"I can't think what's happened to Mops. She is *modernized* somehow," Veronica observed, with a puzzled expression on her face. "She's just bought a little two-seater and whizzes about among the London traffic as cool as a cucumber. I think the huge success of her last book must have bucked her enormously. She's always addressing meetings nowadays and leading debates at little highbrow clubs. Fearfully grand. But she's not nearly so grand *as a person* as she used to be, is she, Nina?"

Giles listened to this conversation with hardly a qualm. "How easily people forget," he reflected, "and what a blessing it is that they do! In its proper place forgetfulness is one of the greatest of the social virtues!"

"Have you seen anything of her recently, Giles?" Nina asked.

"Oh, Lord, yes. We dine and do a play together every now and then. Morwenna and I, after a good deal of maneuvering for position, have settled down into a nice, appreciative, lukewarm friendship. We are really and truly brother and sister!"

"It's queer the way we've all stuck together," said Nina. "One has to go out of England to make friends with one's fellow countrymen. There isn't time in London. It's too big. What's the matter, Bill?"

Bill had been paying no attention to the conversation. He was reading a newspaper and his usually genial face wore an expression of almost fiendish

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rage. "This Ellis Island business is really *too* thick," he snorted. "The cheek of it! Making respectable English women strip, and be examined and insulted, and . . . Why on earth don't we *do* something about it? If we turned the Isle of Dogs into an Ellis Island, and treated all the Yanks as they treat us, they'd jolly soon discover that the system needed reform. It's perfectly monstrous. . . ."

"He gets like that," said Giles affectionately.

"But how unchristian of you, Bill," Veronica cooed. "Because American Immigration authorities have bad manners that's no reason why we should imitate them. After all, *we* ought to know better."

"And you needn't go to America if you don't want to. Besides once you do get in, the Americans are so hospitable that they would soon make you forget about Ellis Island. In any case, *you* wouldn't have to go there." Nina had never seen Bill pent up before. The spectacle delighted her. He had been a free lance journalist for years, but she had never known him read a newspaper. Evidently, he had recently acquired the habit.

"And this debt business," he spluttered. "Why, some of the American States have owed us money ever since 1860 and haven't made the slightest effort to pay, and don't intend to. And they don't even pay their personal debts! I've been owed four hundred dollars by a New York publisher for nine months now and the swine takes not the slightest notice of letters or cables! It's really too

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maddening that we should have to go on shelling out money to everybody, when nobody ever dreams of paying *us*. As a nation we are just like that woman, Madame what's-her-name, in "The Cherry Orchard."

"Scattering largesse," said Nina, in a sepulchral voice, "when all the time we are on the brink of ruin!"

"Well, so we are," Bill retorted.

"At least we've got a fine day for it!" Veronica observed, with resignation.

"Flippant child!"

"We've gone to the bow-wows, ducky, and nobody don't treat us right, and it's a durned shame. We are a misunderstood, ill-treated and hardly used race, and something ought to be done about it. Pity the poor Englishman!" Nina scoffed. "Nobody loves him. How long, Bill dear," she went on, "have you been in this condition of noble frenzy? Is it the English climate? 'My father, poor man, he was fixed that way, too.' But be warned! He spent all day in the In and Out Club writing letters to *The Times*, until he died of a stroke."

"I don't care," said Bill. "People *ought* to . . . to take an interest in things. All you care about is your own comfort, and Giles is just as bad. You lack civic consciousness, the whole lot of you."

"Heavens, Bill! Have you been talking to George Burnham? If you start becoming cosmic

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I shall have to send Veronica home to her mamma, to keep her out of harm's way."

"Mamma is staying with a Bishop," Veronica observed. "So I am quite safe!"

The children suddenly ran back from the pond with their hands full of suffocating frogs. "Nina," Roddy cried, "we're going to have a fwog wace, to see which one gets back first. You say 'Go,' Giles, when we're weady. Veronica, would you like to have one?" Veronica declined. The children stood side by side, clutching the half-asphyxiated frogs in their warm paws. When Giles gave the word the frogs were released and leaped back to safety with surprising agility, while Roddy and Anne pursued them with shrieks of delight. Unfortunately, at the end of the race, there was a dispute as to the ownership of the winning frog. Both Anne and Roddy claimed him and maintained their positions with a wealth of argument until Anne clinched the matter by stretching her arm again into the water and capturing another frog. This she hurled at her brother. "Take your wretched frog then, nasty cheat!" she cried. She then retreated in good order, and flung herself for safety onto Giles' lap. Roddy strolled back with his hands in his pockets, immensely superior. "Girls can't play fair," he remarked bitterly. "It isn't a bit of use twyin' to teach them." The arrival of tea took his mind off one of the world's weightiest problems.

Mrs. Mustard, who was a Yorkshire woman, thoroughly understood tea. The raspberries had

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ripened, and the strawberries and the cherries were not yet over. There was also much cream and several kinds of cake. There was a cake very nearly as black as a Christmas pudding, also one with chocolate icing on it that made one's fingers sticky. Roddy's natural elegance, for he was by instinct something of a dandy, wrestled with his greed as he contemplated it. Greed won and his handkerchief, employed surreptitiously to wipe his fingers with, became a sad sight.

Afternoon slid into evening, evening lingered, reluctant to become night. Hard words are used by foreigners about the English Sunday, and not without justice, for it is a day sacred to intimate pleasures from which the stranger is apt to be excluded. To this group of friends, however, a summer Sunday meant the quintessence of England and of home. Where else in the world could one be so lazy, so utterly comfortable, so contented, so completely at one's ease? Every sound was familiar, every flower and tree a friend. The lawnmower and the garden-roller; the huge ginger-colored cat, slow and stealthy in his movements and selfishly luxurious; the solemn gray rabbit nibbling lettuce-leaves in his hutch; the absurd puppy, all legs and excitement; the frogs and newts and children—how well they all went together! The whirr of the mower, and the wheezy creaking of the roller when the children dragged it across the lawn, stirred sharp, sweet memories in the minds of the grown-ups. No English garden would be complete without a creaking and groaning roller,

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without a cat, a puppy, a rabbit in a hutch, and children and frogs and the clicking of shears and the twittering of birds! And is there anything in all the world more delicious than an English garden?

"It's time for us to go," said Nina, resolutely, at half-past nine. "The children ought to be in bed by now, and I shall get it in the neck from Hugo." Bill got the car out for her, and the children were packed reluctantly into it. She kissed Giles and Veronica affectionately and they tactfully retreated, leaving Bill to make his adieux alone.

Chapter xxiii

ARM in arm, Giles and Veronica walked round the house on to the shadowy lawn. The night was warm and still and peaceful, and the air was full of subtle perfumes.

"Doesn't it just *smell* of England," said Veronica, sniffing ecstatically. "There's something about this warm, cloudy darkness that Italy can't give one. I don't really like the heavens to blaze with stars *every* night, as they did at San Bartolomeo. It's so monotonous."

Giles slipped his arm for a moment round Veronica's yielding waist. When he released her, she looked at him with a troubled expression on her face, but she did not say anything. She knew by intuition exactly what he was thinking. Since their return to England, nearly a year ago, they had become peculiarly intimate friends. All the time that Giles could spare from his work they spent in each other's company, either alone, or with Bill as an always welcome third. They had never seriously quarreled, nor had either concealed anything from the other. That their friendship had remained a friendship had been due entirely to Giles. At times the strain had been as much as he could bear. She admired him for his strength of will, though it cut her to the heart that he should allow his scruples to stand in the way of their

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happiness. The fact that he had loved Morwenna seemed still to come between them. She knew that Giles did not feel for her the same intensity of passion that he had felt for her sister—that for that reason, among others, he had refrained from making love to her. But she saw more clearly than he did that their close comradeship and delight in one another's company was something which he and Morwenna never had achieved and never could have achieved. It was a temperamental impossibility. The other scruple which restrained him from accepting the love she had to offer was his realization of the disparity of their ages. "As if," Veronica reflected bitterly, "the men of five-and-twenty, to-day, are the slightest use to the girls of the same age." If it wasn't Giles whom she took for a lover it would be somebody at least as old as he.

They sat down, once again, in the deck-chairs which waited invitingly under the shade of the horse-chestnut tree.

"It has been a jolly day, dearest," Veronica remarked, with a deep sigh.

"Why are you sighing?" Giles asked.

"I don't know. Why does being happy make one want to cry?" Veronica answered her own question silently, "Because one wants to be happier still."

"That's because you are young," said Giles. "It won't take you that way when you are my age, my dear. I know pretty well what I want in order to achieve *le bonheur de ce monde*. But you are full of vague, disturbing hopes and fears. So

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was I, until a little while ago—a few months ago. Now it's all different, somehow. I'm resigned to middle-age."

"Rubbish," snapped Veronica. Giles always exasperated her when he talked about his age. "Nobody is middle-aged before sixty nowadays. But what *do* you want, dear, anyway?"

Giles chuckled. "My wants are not original, my child. Horace described them fairly accurately, and they are summed up in a sonnet which you probably had to learn at school and didn't appreciate." Giles lay back in his deck-chair and gazed at his shadowy garden. A large round moon had risen just above the hedge which shut in his property—a benevolent, golden moon, conducive to sentiment. He was rather proud of his French accent, and began to quote the sonnet to which he had alluded:

*"Avoir une maison commode, propre et belle,
Un jardin tapissé d'espaliers odorans,
Des fruits, d'excellent vin, peu de train, peu d'enfans,
Posséder seul sans bruit une femme fidèle.*

*"N'avoir dettes, amour, ni procès, ni querelle,
Ni de partage à faire avecque ses parens,
Se contenter de peu, n'espérer rien des Grands,
Régler tous ses desseins sur un juste modèle.*

*"Vivre avecque franchise et sans ambition
S'adonner sans scrupule à la dévotion,
Domter ses passions, les rendre obéissantes*

*"Conserver l'esprit libre et le jugement fort,
Dire son chapelet en cultivant ses entes,
C'est attendre chez soi bien doucement la mort."*

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When he had finished, Veronica slid swiftly on to his knees and put her cool arms round his neck and kissed him on the forehead. "It's a rotten, selfish, materialistic philosophy, my darling," she whispered. "But I'd like you '*posséder seul sans bruit une femme fidèle*'—providing you let me be the *femme fidèle*!"

"Veronica!"

"Am I very shameless, or only very heavy?" she asked. "You can't pretend you don't know how much I love you? Dear, you could have had me months and months ago, when you used to want me so badly. Why didn't you?"

"Veronica, dear!"

"I wouldn't dream of your marrying me, darling—I wouldn't *let* you, not that I've been asked—only even your rotten sonnet admits '*peu d'enfans*.' I don't want absolutely to *swarm* with young, but you'd let me have one of each, dear, wouldn't you?"

"Veronica!" Giles groaned. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"Sweet liar," he whispered. "You know you aren't a day over twenty-four, and I'm forty-one. My child, you'll be a young woman still, by the time I am sixty."

"Darling, if it's necessary I shall send you off to Norman Haire to be rejuvenated! Why, lots of men marry their third wives when they are seventy-five! I shall only be your second. Probably I

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shall die long before you do, and then you'll marry again. The beast, I hate her."

"Who?"

"Your third wife, of course."

"Little Funny!" They kissed long and tenderly, and neither of them heard the sound of Bill's approaching footsteps. He stood watching them, pulling at his pipe. His own aches and pains were anything but healed, but he did not grudge other people their happiness.

"Bill dear," said Veronica, who was the first to see him. "Giles pretends I'm too young for him, or that he's too old for me. What do you think about it."

"Rot," said Bill, huskily. "Doesn't know when he's well off, that's all. You'd better make him understand. Good-night and bless you both. I'm going to have a drink and then I'm turning in."

"We shall have to find some one for Bill," Veronica remarked when he had gone, "or else we shall have to poison poor Hugo. I can't bear to see Bill so unhappy. Giles, are *you* happy?"

"My darling," he whispered. "I'm happier than I *dare* be."

"That's just why I proposed to you. You've just *got* to dare. I wasn't really a forward minx or hussy, was I? You see I knew you wanted me rather badly. You did when I used to come and see you in the Temple, didn't you?"

"Silly creature. Of course I did. I always have, ever since . . ."

"I know . . . I remember the very first moment

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when you first wanted to make love to me. I did so hope you would. But I'm glad you were able not to, too."

"Why?"

"Because you are more likely to be faithful to me, when I'm tiresome and you meet some ravishing beauty. I shall know I can trust you."

Silence fell on them. There was nothing more to say, just then, in words.

Chapter xxiv

THE marriage of Giles and Veronica affected Morwenna more deeply than she would have believed possible. It completed the process, which her love for George Burnham had begun, of forcing her to revise her most settled opinions. It was humiliating to her to have to think things out afresh, at her age and with her assured reputation; humiliating, too, to be forced to the conclusion that on many subjects her views had been at fault. Take "the family" for example. Could it be that they were not in reality the wonderful people she had always assumed that they were? During the days, remembered now not without a touch of regret, when Giles had courted her, she had always looked upon him not only as a suitor for her hand but also as a suppliant for admission to *the family*. Inclusion in the family had seemed to her an honor, an advantage, so incontestable that any one must desire it. But now Giles and Veronica had shown, as clearly as possible, that they both regarded the family with something bordering on aversion. Veronica had not even gone through the formality of consulting her mother about her marriage. She had merely announced the date and had coupled her announcement with a definite refusal to have what she called "a fuss" made about the event. In her annoyance Mrs. Crowley had

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declined to be present and the witnesses had been herself, Nina, Bill Hepburn and Giles' married sister, Mrs. Henderson, and his brother-in-law, Colonel Henderson. There had been a small and very informal luncheon party afterwards, at the Berkeley, at which Morwenna had acted as hostess. But it was not in the least a family gathering. Veronica's remarks about her mother had struck Morwenna as being in the worst of taste. On reflection, however, she was bound to admit that there was some excuse for them. After all, Veronica had had rather a poor time of it, bound to the family chariot-wheels. She had a right to live her own life in her own way and to choose her own friends and associates. But that Veronica should consider that the existence of the family was a positive misfortune for Giles, instead of an asset—that, indeed, was disconcerting. "If only Grandfather had been a blackguard instead of a bishop, we might have been bearable as a clan," Veronica had observed, with cheerful unconcern. The little sister whose mind Morwenna believed she had formed, whose every thought she imagined that she understood, had evidently developed a character of her own. Morwenna had to face the fact that her influence now counted for nothing. Perhaps it never really had counted for anything. Giles' lightest word carried more weight than her own most earnest exhortation. Had pity taken the place, in Veronica's heart, of her former respect? Or had she never really understood Veronica at all? Had she, indeed, ever really

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understood anybody, save perhaps the fictitious characters of her own creation? Morwenna, by gradual stages, came to realize that during the year which had elapsed since her short illicit honeymoon at Grünewald, all her points of view towards Life had changed irrevocably and irremediably. The acts and deeds of the men and women she encountered had now an entirely new significance for her. She felt less detached, and it was with a certain sense of relief that she stepped down from the pedestal which she herself had erected and on which all her lovers, before the advent of George, had insisted upon her remaining.

Another shock to her self-esteem had come to her as the result of her now genuine friendship with Nina Harding. Nina had been quite frank about her relations with Bill, and had given her reasons for not taking him as a lover, without concealing the agony of mind which her decision had caused them both. Morwenna could not escape contrasting the conduct of the "immoral" Nina, the Nina who delighted in coarse jokes and improper stories, with her own. To which of them did the adjectives "pure" and "chaste" most truly apply? There could be but one answer to the question, and the answer was one which Morwenna was much too intellectually courageous to shirk. Clearly it was time for her to refrain from judging the sexual conduct of her sisters. What had her own conduct been? For years she had played the coquette, impelled thereto by selfishness and vanity. And to the first man she had met who had really stirred

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her senses, who had—why blink it?—awakened in her the lusts that are common to every healthy man and woman, she had given herself without a scruple, without a moment's hesitation. True, she had squared her conscience by telling herself a romantic story. It was of this squaring of her conscience, and not of her surrender to George, of which in retrospect she was most bitterly ashamed. Was not the art she practiced, the art to which she had devoted her life, based entirely upon the revelation of truth by means of the imagination? If her work were to have any value at all, it was her duty to refuse resolutely to lie to herself. But she *had* lied to herself: and to that extent to herself she had been unfaithful. But, at last, after much suffering, she had learnt her lesson. And she never forgot that it was George who had taught her, George, the unhappy "Cuckoo"; George, the enemy of all complacent husbands, the despair of all sentimental, unsatisfied virgins; George, the forever discontented; George, the tireless seeker for something that he would never find because he would never recognize it if he saw it.

"There must be selfishness," she thought, "for without a profound selfishness no one can accomplish anything great or worthy, or make himself such a position in the world that he can live without annoying or preying upon his neighbors. It is the *quality* of the selfishness which matters. The finer selfishness produces charity and loving-kindness, just as the finer sensuality necessitates

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virtue and restraint. But there must be no judgments and no condemnations: only selection, avoidance and understanding."

After the publication of her novel, "Then and Now," which not only added to her fame but also rendered her, comparatively speaking, a wealthy woman, Morwenna found herself forced to play a more prominent part in the intellectual life of London than she had done hitherto. She developed into an effective public speaker, and found herself, in consequence, very much in request. All kinds of societies and organizations competed for her support and sought to enlist her eloquence. And she came to find something singularly satisfying in these objective interests. She studied the situation in Morocco, and collected first-hand evidence about the grievances of the Chinese against the exploiting Powers. Without devoting herself to any particular cause she began to be absorbed in the pursuit of accurate information. It was a fascinating quest, this search for "the facts." The value of accounts by eye-witnesses had to be carefully assessed. Even the most honest and truthful people were biased, in one direction or another, and their statements had to be discounted accordingly. The tendentious "news" of world events supplied by the Press had to be judged and considered in the light of what she could discover of the personal policies, prejudices and commercial interests of the principal newspaper proprietors. The methods of suggestion and suppression, by which opinion is influenced,

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had been plainly revealed for all who cared to investigate the matter, during the war period. Morwenna had made a study of wartime "propaganda," and she now made use of the knowledge she had acquired to submit the daily press to a critical test. She was aware that the only possible way of reading the average morning paper with advantage, was to read it very carefully "between the lines." The object of her activity was certainly not the enlightenment of those who walked in darkness but simply to form a theory, if it were possible, as to what was likely to happen in the future to the different branches of the human family. What she labored to obtain for herself was a tolerably accurate "general view." Her quest had its minor amusements and compensations. The experiences of Lord Balfour in Palestine, to take an example, formed a joke too deep, almost, for laughter. It did not require very profound investigation to discover stupidity, knavery, greed and cruelty flourishing in the governments of every country, her own included. Since these things seemed to be inevitable, she accepted them, and used her brain to speculate as to what were likely to be the specific reactions against the more glaring evils. At most of the meetings she attended she encountered Bill Hepburn, and a friendship grew up between them based upon their common interest in what are rather pompously described as "world problems." Bill was much more fiery and much less reflective than herself, but she respected and, indeed, almost envied, his white-hot rages and enthusiasms. She

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did not feel in any way "superior" because of her detachment; she realized that it was just the way she was built. Bill accused her sometimes of "sitting on the fence." It was quite true. She admitted it. But she maintained that it was her job in life to sit there—and observe. "Not an *umpire*," she remarked on one occasion, with some warmth. "Good Heavens, I don't think I'm the Almighty, you silly creature! I'm merely an observation officer, not particularly efficient, I admit, but, all the same, necessary."

Bill belonged temperamentally to those who joined things. Morwenna made speeches that were full of sound information and of common sense to a number of different societies. But she joined none of them. She would not even, though Bill strenuously urged her to do so, join an organization designed to expose and counteract the British Fascisti. "It will only advertise them, and increase their number and their power for evil," she said. "But look here," Bill argued. "These fellows have started kidnaping Communist speakers like Pollitt. Nothing happens to them. The whole affair is taken with the traditional British good humor and treated as a joke. The fascists escape scot free. Well and good. Supposing they do the same thing again, and then again? What will happen? The other side will get annoyed. They will start kidnaping some old general, en route to address a meeting of 'patriots.' Then the fascists will retaliate. The socialist kidnapers will be arrested and instead of being let

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off with a good-humored caution they will, for a certainty, be treated as criminals. Then the fascisti will break up another socialist meeting, with the life-preservers that they keep up their sleeves. The socialists will lose their tempers and a few fascists will be laid out. And so you may get a state of things utterly unnecessary in this country—a bitter class war, in which blood will flow like water. And the whole thing is so unutterably stupid. Nothing could be more repugnant to decent English people than fascist methods. They are dead against all our traditions. . . .”

“You flatter us, my dear,” said Morwenna. “We have always submitted, up to a point, to the domination of the most brutal, violent and densely stupid elements in the community. We like them. They maintain the prestige of the British flag throughout the world. Their ‘methods’ do not change, nor do their opinions. Your agitation is superfluous, Bill, because it does not go deep enough or far enough. If you organized a successful Revolution it might do some good, by forcing numbers of brutal, vicious and stupid people to flee the country. But how can you guarantee that the men who will rise to the top as the result of your Revolution will not be even more brutal, vicious and stupid than the types they displace? At present, the ‘Black and Tan’ elements among the governing classes are kept in fairly strict control by the good sense of the community. If you have your upheaval the same types will assert them-

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selves and may be under no sort of control at all. . . .”

These conversations, without permanently damping Bill's ardor, gave him a profound respect for Morwenna's brain and personality—a respect which developed, by slow and scarcely noted stages, into something very much warmer. And at last they discovered an organization, unconnected with politics, which they could both join and for which they were both prepared to work.

Chapter xxv

"ISN'T it odd, the way things happen?" said Veronica to her husband, over the breakfast table at The White Cottage, some six months after their marriage. Giles smiled, indulgently.

"I know my remark wasn't original, dearest. All the same you needn't grin like that! It *is* odd! We all seem to have to go in twos, sooner or later. But Nature, or the Almighty, invents the oddest reasons for bringing it about."

"Get on with it, darling," said Giles. He had noticed the open letter in her hand and recognized Morwenna's handwriting. "Don't tease. Let's have the news."

"I'll bet you anything you like that Bill and Morwenna are going to get married!" Giles stared at his wife blankly for a moment or two; then he laughed.

"Well, I'm blessed! Life *has* had a joke with us, since those far-off days when we played about together on the beach at San Bartolomeo! We little knew what was in store for us, did we? But Bill and Morwenna! I thought they loathed each other."

"So did I," said Veronica, "but you know how interested they've both become in highbrow societies—the 'Friends of China' and the 'Far East Association' and the 'Famine Council' and

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all that kind of thing? Bill has developed this extraordinary craze for going to meetings, and I expect he goes to the same ones that Mops goes to, and has probably been overcome by her eloquence. Meanwhile listen to this: 'Bill Hepburn and I have just agreed to become joint secretaries of the new *International Students' League*. I don't know how we shall pull together, but we are both extremely interested in the work. It does seem a practical way, as far as it goes, of seeking peace and ensuing it. So many of these Peace Societies seem merely to emit hot air and to get no further. Bill has, of course, very big ideas as to what we shall be able to accomplish. I shall, personally, be quite satisfied if we can double our membership, at present rather small, during the coming twelve months. Our offices are in Trafalgar Buildings, close to Trafalgar Square. They are very poky, of course, but the situation is good. . . ."

"She doesn't *say* anything about marrying," Giles observed. Veronica looked at him pityingly. "Really, Giles! *Of course*, she doesn't!"

"But why?"

"I'll bet you five pounds. Will you take it?"

"No," said Giles, laughing. "You are usually right in these matters. All the same—Bill, Nina, Morwenna."

"Not to mention George Burnham?"

"George Burnham?" echoed Giles. "Was there anything *in* that?"

"Of course there was," said Veronica. "Every-

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thing. Morwenna was madly in love with him for a time. *Probably* she still is. That's why she has changed so much, I daresay. All the same, you watch, she'll marry Bill. After all, dearest, you've married me, haven't you?"

Giles blushed, but Veronica was not displeased by the glance he gave her.

"Are you bearing up under the strain, sweetheart?" she asked.

For answer Giles got up and kissed her tenderly.

"Because, if you can stand the shock," Veronica went on, "you may as well know that you are going to be a proud father in about six months' time. . . ."

"Oh, V. dear!"

"You needn't look as if you'd done something to be proud of. This is my show, Giles, and don't you forget it. I've decided that it is to be a girl."

"Why?" Giles asked.

"Because you want one, sweetheart, and I've a sort of weakness for trying to give you what you want. I know it's stupid, but I can't help it!"

Veronica had all the match-making instincts of the happily married woman, and insisted on trying to do something to bring both Bill and Morwenna "to the point." She knew that it was useless to expect Nina to help. The best that she could hope for was that Nina would remain neutral. Luckily she was abroad again, with the children. Veronica decided that it was essential that Bill should propose and be accepted before her return. With this end in view she invited them both to

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spend a week-end at The White Cottage. It was rather a harassing week-end for Giles and Veronica, for both Morwenna and Bill seemed half-intoxicated with their "International Students' League" and appeared to be able to talk and think of nothing else. The League was discussed remorselessly at luncheon and dinner and even at breakfast. At last, in desperation, Veronica resorted to direct action. She buttonholed Bill and took him round the garden to look at the apple-blossoms.

"I'm awfully glad that you and Mops have found this interest in common, Bill," she remarked. "It will be a blessing for both of you. You'll marry, I suppose? It seems indicated, doesn't it?"

"D'you think so?" asked Bill, rather dubiously.

"Don't you?"

"I don't think Morwenna cares for me, like that."

"Have you asked her?" Veronica inquired, remorselessly.

"N-no."

"Then why ever don't you? It would be so suitable," said Veronica. "And so jolly, for all of us. It's so obviously the thing that ought to happen!" Veronica tactfully changed the subject, and for the rest of the day she and Giles effaced themselves as far as they could. Morwenna and Bill disappeared after supper and were not seen again for two hours. When they returned Veronica elaborately stifled a yawn.

"Hullo, you two. Been for a walk?" she

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remarked casually. She and Giles exchanged meaning glances.

"Like a drink, old man?" Giles inquired of Bill, without looking up from his book.

Bill said: "By Jove, that's a good idea."

"Let's all have one!" cried Veronica, jumping to her feet. "Let's drink to the success of the 'International Students' League!'" She ran to get the glasses while Giles brought out the whisky decanter and a siphon.

Both Bill and Morwenna found it quite impossible to conceal their nervousness, their excitement and their joy. But Veronica had no intention of forcing a declaration. It was enough for her to know that her little plot had succeeded.

An hour later, when she was just ready to get into bed, she stepped along the corridor to Morwenna's room. She found her sister sitting in a silk wrapper in front of her looking glass, doing experiments with her hair.

"I'm just wondering whether I shall try to get rid of this straight fringe," said Morwenna unconcernedly. "Do you think it would suit me better, V., if I showed more forehead?"

Veronica laughed, and kissed her sister. They kissed very rarely, and the significance of the embrace was not lost upon Morwenna.

"I never saw you looking better, dear," said Veronica, "than you do to-night. I shouldn't alter anything if I were you."

"Did you guess we were going to marry?" Morwenna asked, shyly.

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"Of course I did," said Veronica. "And, oh, Mops, I'm so glad. Bill is an angel, and he's been awfully unhappy. . . ."

"I never understood Bill in the old days." Then, with surprising humility, she added: "I don't think I really understood anybody, myself least of all."

At breakfast Bill received the congratulations of his friends with sheepish pleasure. He was obviously overjoyed and at the same time thoroughly embarrassed. The meal was evidently a torture to him and he was relieved when they all went into the garden and absorbed themselves in newspapers. Bill seized *The Times* and opened it by chance at the page on which divorces are reported. The first name that met his eye was that of George Burnham.

"Hullo," he cried, wishing to make polite conversation, "here's that fellow Burnham, in the divorce courts. Venables v. Venables and Burnham. He's been made a co-respondent by a country vicar. Stayed with the chap's wife somewhere in Bavaria. I always had a suspicion, somehow, that he was that kind of chap. Had you heard about this, Morwenna?"

Morwenna's face had become pale and drawn and Veronica and Giles were in a state of consternation. What could have come over Bill to drop such an appalling brick. Had he forgotten? Didn't he know? Any anxiety they may have had on Morwenna's account, however, was soon at rest.

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Her agitation was only momentary. "Yes," she said, "I heard about it. Poor old George. Whatever people may say about him, there *is* something fine about George. I shall always be grateful to him, anyway."

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," came faintly from the orchard.

"He's early this year, the old villain," Giles observed.

"I heard him yesterday for the first time."

"Why do you call him a villain?" Morwenna asked. "I expect he has his proper place in the world, like everybody else. He follows his instincts; and he eats hairy caterpillars. Like the rest of us, he does his job."

THE END

